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GIANT PETE AND HIS PARDS.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.



TRAPPER TOM LOOKED AT THE DEAD SIOUX A FULL MINUTE WITHOUT REPLYING TO OLD TOMAHAWK'S QUESTION.

Giant Pete and His Pards; OR, TRAPPER TOM, THE WOOD IMP.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

CHAPTER I.

DEFENDING HIS RIGHTS.

ON the bank of a well-wooded stream which, rising among the hills of northwestern Wyoming, flows north, and at last loses itself in the majestic Yellowstone, rose a small cabin, built of rough logs, well chinked, and capable of affording both protection and shelter.

It was too small to accommodate a settler's family of any size, and then it was too far removed from a settlement of any pretensions to convey the belief that some fearless tiller of the soil had brought wife and little ones to that spot.

It stood in the land of the buffalo, the antelope and the grizzly, and its wild but picturesque surroundings suggested stirring scenes and perilous times for its people.

If the young reader had reached this advanced cabin at sundown, on a certain April day, he would have been greeted by its sole possessor and inhabitant.

This individual, almost a pygmy—for he was a boy in years and size—mated well in dress the region by which he was surrounded.

Clad as he was in garments formed from the skins of wild animals, and no doubt shaped by his own hands, he looked like a boy Kit Carson, who, breaking from the restraints of home, had resolved for a while to try the wild life of a young lord of the wilderness.

The eyes of the boy were black, but moreover possessed of a merry twinkle.

His face was handsome, well rounded and ruddy, the work of good food, exercise and the healthful winds of the great Northwest. His figure was well built, shapely in every respect, and he stood but five feet in the serviceable moccasins that covered his feet.

Behind him rose the cabin, and leaning against it at his right hand was a trusty rifle, which was, without doubt, the boy's best friend.

When the last beams of the setting sun had disappeared the youth turned slowly toward the west in which direction he gazed for some time without speaking.

"I'll try it again," he suddenly exclaimed as he turned into the cabin as if anxious to carry out a certain project. "I'm going to discover who has been tampering with my traps. Night after night they are visited, and good pelts continually disappear. I will not stand it, even though I am on Sioux ground. The game doesn't belong to the Indian, and I have rights here which even he must respect."

The boy reappeared at the door of the hut as he uttered the last word.

He carried across one shoulder now a stout stick from which hung three good beaver-traps, and having closed the cabin door behind him, he picked up the rifle and hurried off toward the stream.

A few steps brought him to the crystal-like waters of the little tributary, and he was soon following them in their course to the north.

The shadows lengthened until the whole face of the country seemed in eclipse, but the boy trapper pursued his way.

At last he came to what appeared to be an inland bayou above whose surface rose a number of queer-looking elevations which were beaver-houses.

The boy was in the midst of good beaver territory, and after surveying as much of the scene as was observable, he unloaded his traps and proceeded to set them.

His movements indicated that it was not his first visit to the place.

Several times before he had set his traps on good beaver-trails only to discover that some sneaking villain had visited them before him and deftly abstracted their victims.

For some days prior to the opening of our story the boy was repeatedly robbed.

Never before had this thing happened to him.

He was inclined to think that Indians had discovered his traps and robbed them of their game.

Indians!

The thought was not a pleasant one for the young trapper who had dared to set his traps on the verge of the great trapping-ground claimed and frequented by the Sioux at whose head as chief stood the renowned and blood-thirsty Sitting Bull.

"I'm here for pleasure and gain!" he said, firmly compressing his lips. "No Indian shall drive me from this region!"

Brave words these were, and words of which he was likely to repent.

Let us return to him.

Not a breath of air, nor the movements of a beaver rippled the calm surface of the little bayou while the Wood Imp adjusted the traps.

"There!" he exclaimed, in a whisper, as he stepped back. "The traps are ready for beaver, and I am prepared for the thief, whoever he is."

Gliding back from the bank to a tree whose lower branches could be reached from the ground, he nimbly drew his lithe figure up among them, and seated himself on a limb where it joined the body of the tree, and awaited results.

Slowly the night came on with the little trapper ensconced in the tree with eyes and ears on the alert.

When the day had fairly disappeared a watery moon came out and kept the boy's surroundings visible, although indistinctly.

He saw the beaver-houses in the bayou and the spot where the land and water met.

He watched the places where he had deposited his traps with jealous eye.

"Why doesn't the red thief come?" he asked himself with eagerness. "I am more than ready to meet him. I will show him what it is to steal from Trapper Tom."

His patience seemed in no hurry to be reward-

ed, for the night grew into long watches, and Trapper Tom, as the Wood Imp called himself, was compelled to nurse his restlessness as best he could.

All at once he started and leaned forward.

Had his sharp ears caught the footsteps of the beaver-thief?

No, there was a commotion at the edge of the water, and Trapper Tom knew that one of the traps had secured its victim.

Instantly several splashes sounded in as many directions, as the beaver, alarmed by the catastrophe which had befallen one of their number, sought the houses scattered over the bayou, and a few moments later the silence of death brooded over the scene.

A satisfied smile overspread the face of the boy.

"The trap has caught a beaver, now I will catch the thief."

He had heard another sound which he knew was not made by the entrapped animal, and his eyes had caught sight of a figure gliding toward the successful trap with the stealth of the panther.

"That's the rascal!" grated Trapper Tom, as he gazed at the prowler with a pair of eyes that fairly flashed. "Want my beaver, do you?" he went on. "Well, my pesky red-skin, I may attempt to keep my property."

He saw the pelt-thief pass within a few feet of his perch, and all at once he lowered himself from the limb and dropped to the ground without noise.

In another moment he had thrown himself fearlessly on the trail of the sneak-thief, who, intent only on obtaining the game already scented, did not look once behind him.

Nearer and nearer to the night prowler crept Trapper Tom whose eyes glistened more and more as he advanced.

He saw the trap-despoiler stoop over the animal which, drawn beneath the waters in its frantic struggles for freedom, had been drowned.

Suddenly like an eagle that fall upon its victim the Wood Imp swooped upon him.

"That's my beaver!"

If a fiery rocket had shot suddenly from the water, the would-be thief would not have leaped up in greater consternation.

He almost tumbled into the bayou in his effort to face the person who had spoken and Trapper Tom was not less astonished.

"Your beaver?" exclaimed the prowler in good but rough-voiced English. "Great Jehosaphat! atom, whar did you hail from?"

Trapper Tom stared at the speaker, who, to his astonishment, was not an Indian but a tall, lank and vagabondish specimen of a white man!

For two minutes at least after the lank fellow's question there was no response.

Trapper Tom was surveying the detected thief from head to foot, not only mad, but disgusted.

He had expected, even hoped, to catch a red-skin; but instead, he had unmasked a white rascal—one of those forest vagabonds who are too mean to attempt an honest livelihood.

"Who are you, anyhow?" suddenly asked the man. "Don't think I ever had the pleasure ov

yer acquaintance before. Are you the owner ov the shanty back thar on the creek?"

The nonchalance and impudence of the man were insulting.

"Yes, sir!" said the boy. "That cabin is mine. The beaver you have already taken belonged to me and my name is Trapper Tom."

"Glad to hear it, I am," was the answer. "Trapper Tom, eh? Not much bigger than a minute. Say, I could eat you up."

The stature of the little trapper seemed to increase an inch at this boast, and his eyes said "Try it, sir," in language not to be mistaken.

"Who are you?" he asked. "It must be true as you have said that we have met for the first time."

"Me? I'm Old Tomahawk." And the speaker showed his teeth in a grin. "Look here, my little chap. When I want a thing I generally take it."

"If it belongs to you."

"Sometimes if it doesn't. Didn't you hint awhile ago that I war about to take yer beaver?"

"I did."

"Don't be too fast. I want something besides beaver just now. Scalps!"

"There's only one here and that's mine," laughed Trapper Tom.

"Are ye sure ov that?"

"No; there's yours."

"Which makes two. But thar's more than two. How long hev you lived here?"

"Five months."

"And seen no Injuns?"

"No. I've had this paradise all to myself."

"Hev, eh? Whar hev yer eyes been? Come this way, greeny. Old Tomahawk 'll show you."

Before Trapper Tom could resist he was being dragged from the spot, with his arm encircled by Old Tomahawk's skeleton hand.

Down the edge of the bayou he was dragged, then along the sluggish stream that fed it to its junction with a larger tributary of the Yellowstone.

At the foot of a rather steep bank Old Tomahawk stopped and dropped the boy trapper's arm.

"Look thar!" he said, pointing toward the ground.

Trapper Tom gazed for a moment and then recoiled with a cry.

On the ground lay a dead Indian, freshly scalped!

"No Injuns here, you say, eh?" grinned Old Tomahawk. "What do you think now?"

CHAPTER II.

IN A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.

TRAPPER TOM looked at the dead Sioux a full minute without replying to Old Tomahawk's question.

"Lived here five months without seein' a red-skin? Great Jehosaphat! Trapper Tom, whar hev yer peepers been all the time?"

"Where they are at this minute—in my head," was the answer.

"I doubt that," remarked Old Tomahawk, doubtfully. "See here, to be plain, I killed that red-skin not an hour ago. I'm not in these

parts fer beaver, but fer scalps. I'm on a big Injun-hunt, and it's queer that my trail should hev led me here whar you hev'n't seen a red-skin in five months!"

"There!" said Trapper Tom, irritated by Old Tomahawk's words and manner. "If there had been Indians in these parts they haven't molested me."

"That's no sign they don't intend ter," was the quick response. "If you'll go back to yer cabin I'll tell you something."

Trapper Tom seemed to hesitate.

What! take that dark-faced fellow to his cabin stocked with the valuable results of trail and trap?

He remembered that he had caught Old Tomahawk in the act of lifting a beaver from his trap, and now the disreputable character had coolly asked to be conducted to the cabin stored with pelts, which, to the boy, were a snug little fortune.

It is no wonder that the Wood Imp hesitated.

"I see!" exclaimed Old Tomahawk. "You've got something under yer shanty roof you don't want this forest pilgrim ter examine. You seem ter believe yet that I war goin' ter lift a beaver awhile ago. 'Pon honor, boy, I war'n't. I hold up my hand and say that, though Old Tomahawk ain't ez pure ez a baby, he never touched a white man's trap ter rob it. What war I doin' at yer trap when you caught me thar, eh? I war goin' ter see what war in it, nothing more. Ef you want the thief who has been visitin' yer traps night arter night, behold him thar. I took his scalp a while ago, an' when I overtook him he war goin' back fer another beaver. I'm hard, an' not pretty. I'm bony an' profane; but by Jehosaphat! Trapper Tom, Old Tomahawk don't steal!"

There was in the force of the forest vagabond's asseverations something that favorably impressed the boy trapper.

"I don't care," Old Tomahawk went on. "If you don't want to hear anything, don't show me yer shanty. You're the master ov yer own fortunes, an' mebbe you don't want to know how safe yer pelts are."

These words decided Trapper Tom.

"Pardon me for doubting you," he said. "We will go to the hut. Aren't you afraid to let the Indian lie here?"

"Reckon not. I guess he'll disturb nobody."

"Very well. To my cabin, then."

When Trapper Tom turned on his heel and started off at a brisk gait, he was followed by his new and not prepossessing acquaintance, whose eyes betrayed the eagerness that seemed to fill his heart.

But few words were exchanged by the strange pair as they pushed through the forest. Trapper Tom still in the lead, for, though Old Tomahawk's strides were lengthier than his, he could not keep up with the boy.

"Here we are!"

Trapper Tom threw open the door of his forest home as the announcement left his lips, and turning on Old Tomahawk he presented a look of pride.

The interior of the cabin was quite dark, but the little trapper soon produced a light, which

illuminated the room, and dissipated the shadows of log and beam.

Old Tomahawk surveyed the interior of the place with a good deal of wonderment.

"Who helped you build this shanty?" he asked.

"I didn't build it. It was here when I came."

"No!"

"That is the truth."

"An' it war empty?"

"Yes."

"You found nothin' in it?"

"Nothing."

"Not a hide?"

"It was stripped as clean as a gang of wolves strips a buffalo carcass."

"Thet's kinder queer," mused Old Tomahawk aloud. "Say, boy, see here. You didn't find a wooden stake in one corner ov the shanty?"

Trapper Tom gave the man a singular look.

"I found no stake," he said. "Are you looking for a cabin with a wooden stake in one of its corners?"

Old Tomahawk started perceptibly.

"N—no," he stammer'd. "The inquiry happened ter get into my head an' I let it out—thet's all, boy." And despite his words, the old fellow's eyes wandered to the several corners of the cabin.

A moment later he leaned against the rough logs that formed one of the walls of the room and folded his long arms upon his chest.

"Trapper Tom, thar ar' more Injuns than beaver in this kentry," he began. "I don't keer ef you've been here five years instead ov five months. Thet fact doesn't make one Injun less. How many pelts hev you?"

That was a bold question.

The boy had already obtained proof of Old Tomahawk's inquisitiveness, but here was an interrogative that affected his property—that wealth for which he had toiled for five long months.

"You needn't tell me ef you don't want to," continued Old Tomahawk. "I don't look very honest—thet's a fact; but mebbe it isn't altogether my fault. I war goin' ter say that whether you've got one beaver-pelt er a thousand they're not safe here."

Trapper Tom started.

"I wouldn't be surprised ef yer pelts hev already been invoiced by a lot ov red devils who know their value. I know what I'm talkin' about. Trapper Tom, sometimes them Injuns will let a feller go on an' get a good lot ov skins, then, all at once, they'll pounce down upon him an' take 'em all."

These were plain words and easily understood.

The Wood Imp did not reply.

"One week ago I war listenin' behind an Injun ledge in a Sioux village thet holds thar meanest lot ov red tigers thet ever lived under a scarlet hide. I warthar on business. I heard them Injuns talk about a youngster what hed laid in a stock ov prime beaver an' other pelts an' they laughed when they talked about the amount ov fire-water them same pelts would purchase. The next day twenty young bucks

got away from that same Injun town. What do you think took 'em out?"

"My treasure!"

Old Tomahawk's eyes twinkled.

"Are you sure you still own them hides?" he asked.

Trapper Tom's reply was a bound toward a roughly-fashioned ladder whose upper end was lost to view among the shadows overhead.

Placing one foot on the lower round he went up with the agility of a sailor, and Old Tomahawk saw him disappear beyond a dark opening which was nothing less than a passageway to a garret, the storehouse of the little trapper's treasure.

Of course it was dark where the skins were stored, too dark to let Trapper Tom's eyes be of any service to him, and he stood for a moment with his moccasins on the top round of the ladder.

All at once the anxious man below saw him descend.

The boy came down the ladder with more than usual rapidity, and, as he landed on the ground, he wheeled upon Old Tomahawk and presented a face that almost drove the Indian back forward.

The next instant the boy stood before the gaunt trailer.

"My skins are there yet, Tomahawk," said Trapper Tom, in a cautious whisper. "But, my God! they are weighted down with Injuns!"

It was a brief report of a terrible discovery.

For a second Old Tomahawk seemed stunned.

Then he sprung forward and swung to the heavy door, placing in its proper place the stout oak barricade.

"Thar ar' Injuns outside, too, boy!" he said, hoarsely.

CHAPTER III.

MORE THAN HIS MATCH.

RED SKINS in the loft overhead, and red-skins just beyond the cabin door.

Is it a wonder that Trapper Tom looked into Old Tomahawk's eyes for a full minute after the last announcement and did not articulate a single syllable?

He had been permitted to trap five months in peace, and no red-skin had come to frighten him from his trapping-ground.

He had accumulated a large quantity of the most valuable pelts, and was looking forward to the time when he could astonish the managers of the nearest trading-post with the results of his winter with his traps.

But now he had made a discovery terrible enough to blanch the cheeks of the bravest trapper.

His pelts had been found by the wily Indian; a lot of the red fiends were actually lying upon them, and Old Tomahawk had just declared that there were others around the cabin.

"Injuns on yer pelts, eh?" said the gaunt trailer, hard upon his startling announcement, and before Trapper Tom could speak. "Wal, ef this ain't a pickle, I'm no judge. I saw one feller, bigger than a grizzly, sneakin' outside thar when I shut the door. How many ar' lyin' on ther skins?"

"I didn't stop to count them," answered the little trapper. "I touched the moccasin of one, and heard others; that was enough."

"They war waitin' for you to come back, but they didn't expect me to come along," and Old Tomahawk smiled. "No, my dandy, since we're in the brine an' pretty well pickled, we've got to get out."

"Yes," said the Wood Imp, resolutely. "Those skins up there are as precious as my own, almost. The red-skins shall not carry one away. I haven't trapped all winter to buy a lot of dirty Sioux a few gallons of fire water. I propose to defend my property to the last extremity."

"And I'll help you, Trapper Tom!" cried Old Tomahawk as he strode forward and seized the boy's hand.

"Them Injuns up in the loft keep mighty still; they don't know that you discovered them."

"I merely touched the moccasin, but I knew, all the same, that it covered an Indian's foot. Hark!"

Trapper Tom sprung to the door as he uttered the exclamation and listened for a moment with one ear at the portal, but with his face turned toward the gaunt trailer.

Suddenly the door was struck as with a clinched hand by some one outside.

"Hello, thar!" said a voice. "Don't you open your door to a white man?"

The next instant Old Tomahawk stood at the boy's side.

"A white man?" he echoed in tones intended only for Trapper Tom's ears.

"It 'pears to me that I ought to know that voice. If it's the man I think it is he's meaner than the meanest Injun that ever breathed. Tell him he can't come in now, boy."

Trapper Tom was only too eager to inform the speaker that to him and all men of his class the cabin was barred, and his eyes twinkled madly as he spoke.

"My house is shut to you and the Sioux," he said in firm tones. "Every man's cabin is his castle."

His reply was answered by a prolonged whistle, and then by a coarse, disdainful laugh.

"Mighty smart you are, my little beaver-catcher," cried the man at the door. "So you don't open your door to Mountain Pete?"

"I do not."

A minute's silence followed.

"He isn't afraid to speak his name," whispered Old Tomahawk. "He's bigger than two common men an' stout as an ox. He's got an Injun wife an' Sittin' Bull made him a chief last summer. Mountain Pete, eh? I know him; but he doesn't know that Old Tomahawk is nigh."

"He's probably the leader of the Indians who have made a descent upon me," replied Trapper Tom."

"He helped to advise 'em; that's certain. But the greasers in the loft, boy? Suthin's got to be done with that party. I'll poke my nose into the darkness up thar, an' see what I can see!"

Old Tomahawk stepped to the ladder leading

to the store-house of the pelts and began to ascend.

"Let me git my fingers on a moccasin!" he said half audibly to himself. "I'm itchin' to close on an Injun ankle. The boy don't more than half trust me, an' I don't wonder at it, seein' whar he caught me to-night, an' judgin' from my beauty."

The old fellow by this time had reached the top of the ladder, and a part of his lank figure had disappeared beyond the opening.

With bated breath and anxious face the boy trapper watched them from below.

At once Old Tomahawk's hand began to search the darkness that reigned in the garret.

"Whar's that Injun moccasin Trapper Tom says he felt?" he asked himself. "I guess the boy war— No! he war not mistaken. I've tackled it!"

The next second the Indian hunter was pulling away at an ankle which his skeleton hand had suddenly encircled, and, despite the Indian's struggles, he was drawing him surely toward him.

"Thar's a foot in thet moccasin, sure enough!" he called down to Trapper Tom. "I've caught a daisy in the trap that never lets up on a victim. Here he comes! Look out for a red jumper!"

As he finished he drew the red-skin to the opening, and Trapper Tom who had sprung to the foot of the ladder sprung back at sight of the red enemy in Old Tomahawk's grasp.

The Indian was a lusty Sioux buck who had not yet won his eagle feathers, but he was not too young to make one of a thieving party whose goal was the store-house of a lot of valuable skins.

"He's about yer size, so I'll toss him down to you!" continued Old Tomahawk to the little trapper. "I like to tackle somebody of my size. Look out! Here he comes!"

Before Trapper Tom could prepare to meet the Indian youth, he was tumbling head over heels down the ladder, and he landed on the ground so suddenly that the boy involuntarily retreated.

If the Indian was not Old Tomahawk's equal he was more than the boy's; but what Trapper Tom lacked in physique he more than made up in courage.

The Sioux had scarcely touched the ground before he was on his feet apparently unhurt by his swift descent from above, and ready for a combat of any kind.

"Fight it out, you two!" cried Old Tomahawk. "I'm goin' to see how many more's up here," and his feet disappeared from the ladder.

Trapper Tom had no time for stratagem.

The young Sioux whose eyes flashed like mad stars appeared like a panther ready for the spring.

Scarcely eight feet separated the two youths, and an agile bound would easily clear that interval.

"White trapper die!" suddenly roared the Indian. "Young Eagle take his scalp back to big village!"

"If you can!" shot Trapper Tom defiantly, as with hastily-drawn knife he braced himself to meet the onset as best he could.

The last word was still on his lips when the Indian made the leap.

For a second the figure of Young Eagle seemed to remain in mid-air and then the twain, knife-armed, came together!

It was a collision that carried both almost to the door at Trapper Tom's back, and with difficulty they were enabled to keep their feet.

The Wood Imp aimed a blow at the Indian's naked breast, but a red arm parried it just in time to save its owner's life, and the next moment the combatants went to the ground.

It was Young Eagle's strength that brought about the fall; physically, he was more than a match for Trapper Tom; but the latter's pluck stood him in good need when he found himself the under dog in the fight on the cabin floor.

The Sioux was determined to put a speedy end to the combat and would have done so if the boy trapper had not slipped out from under him like an eel and broke from his grasp.

The Indian sprung up with an exclamation of rage and dashed immediately at the little trapper.

"Boy's scalp gone now!" he hissed.

Trapper Tom had but a second in which to meet the impetuous attack.

The rough wall of the apartment was at his back and he could not retreat an inch further.

It was the most perilous moment in his career.

Quick as a flash he threw up his knife arm, and as the young Sioux descended upon him like a thunderbolt he struck with all his might.

This time there was a cry of pain and the knife fell from the Sioux's hand as he reeled toward the ladder half-way down which was the figure of Old Tomahawk, a spectator to the fight.

Trapper Tom did not follow up his success, but stood where he had dealt the blow and gazed at the Indian.

"I guess I'll keep my scalp!" he said in tones of triumph. "I'll keep my pelts too, Old Tomahawk."

"Look out, boy. He's goin' to make his last dash!"

The warning was not spoken a moment too soon.

The wounded red-skin darted forward like an arrow suddenly discharged from a Sioux bow, but not at Trapper Tom.

He passed him out of arm's length, and was at the door before the boy trapper could comprehend his intention.

"He mustn't git out!" cried Old Tomahawk.

Trapper Tom realized the situation even before the Indian-fighter had spoken, but the Sioux had already nearly accomplished his intention.

The little beaver-catcher leaped forward to thwart the Indian, and Old Tomahawk made an effort to reach the spot at the same time.

Both were too late!

The barricade which the rapid hands of Young Eagle wrenched from its place was flung into Trapper Tom's face, and the ladder, shoved from its place by Old Tomahawk's effort, had fallen with that worthy to the ground.

The boy trapper and his friend heard the door open, and the former caught sight of the

wounded Sioux as he leaped across the threshold to lose himself in the night beyond!

The Indian's escape had not lasted a minute, but before the beaver-hunter recovered from his astonishment Old Tomahawk had shut the door again and had it barricaded once more.

"More'n a handful, warn't he, Tom?" he asked with a grin as he faced the Wood Imp. "He's the only red-skin I found among the pelts—"

"But I heard more than one up there."

"I don't doubt that," was the response. "But you see whar thar's a hole the rats will git out."

"A hole?"

"Yes: thar's a hole in yer roof big enough to let an Injun out. Somehow or other, that young buck stayed behind. Mebbe he wishes he hadn't now."

Trapper Tom without reply sprung to the fallen ladder.

"I must see to my pelts. I do not doubt that the Indians carried off the best ones."

"They all seem to be there, but I don't know how many you had. Mebbe you had better inspect the pile."

The ladder was speedily set back in its place, and, provided with a light, Trapper Tom ascended to the loft.

He found abundant evidence there of the visit of more than one Indian, and a hole in the roof already discovered by Old Tomahawk showed him how they got away.

He next examined the precious pelts and uttered an exclamation of joy when he discovered that, although they had made soft couches for the thieving Sioux, not one had been taken.

Yes, they were still safe, but the circumstances that surrounded them were no guarantee that they would remain so.

He closed the opening in the roof as well as he could with the means then at his disposal, and descended to the waiting Indian hunter with his report.

"I'm glad to hear they're safe," said Old Tomahawk; "but, my dear boy, you an' yer pelts ar' just now in a mighty ticklish place."

"Ticklish or not, sir, I'm going to stay here and keep them or lose my scalp!" was the answer. "Let the Sioux come, Tomahawk. What I've toiled for through rain, snow and sleet, I shall defend with the last drop of my blood!"

Old Tomahawk stepped back and eyed the little trapper proudly for a moment.

"You're little, but thar's a giant's grit in you!" he suddenly exclaimed. "If you could trust Old Tomahawk altogether, we could be friends."

"I can do that!" said Trapper Tom, and the next moment he buried his hand in Old Tomahawk's palm.

CHAPTER IV.

A STORY AND A SHOT.

OLD TOMAHAWK believed that he had closed the cabin door just in time behind the wounded Indian whose escape had been so sudden as to startle the boy trapper.

It was not likely that Mountain Pete, the renegade, and his companions had taken their

departure, and the old scalp-hunter believed as well he might, that the end was not yet.

For a moment the occupants of the cabin stood face to face with clasped hands, and when they stepped apart, a friendship which death only could break had been formed.

"We've got to prepare fer a reg'lar tussle," said Old Tomahawk. "The Injuns have scented the plunder, an' they're not goin' back without it if they kin help it. I know Mountain Pete an' the whole posse out thar only too well, an' I calkerlate that some ov 'em have heard ov Old Tomahawk."

"If they have not, they will form his acquaintance, eh, my friend?"

"Wal, they will," was the reply, as the eyes of the Indian-hunter twinkled savagely. "What's yer stock ov ammunition, boy?"

Trapper Tom replied by showing his new friend a small keg of powder, a lot of balls, with lead and molds for more, an additional rifle, and two extra revolvers.

Old Tomahawk pronounced the little arsenal "a good lay-out," and remarked that Mountain Pete and his friends would meet with a warm reception if they openly attacked the cabin.

Contrary to Trapper Tom's expectations, the minutes passed without bringing on open hostilities.

He thought that the wounded Indian's escape would be swiftly followed by an attack, but Old Tomahawk assured him that the set outside had their heads together and were plotting some new devilment.

During the calm, the pelts stored in the loft of the cabin were carried below and piled in one corner that they might be better defended.

It was feared that as the Indians who had been concealed among the skins had escaped by the roof, they would return by the same channel during an attack on the cabin and get away with the precious booty.

The sight of the results of Tom's trapping season gladdened the eyes of Old Tomahawk when they formed a great heap in one corner of the little apartment.

There were skins of all the fur-bearing animals of that portion of the great Northwest—foxes, beaver, mink, muskrat and marten, with some elegant bear robes and wolf-skins.

Trapper Tom's eyes glowed with pride as he surveyed the heap, and he mentally vowed that they should not pass from his hands into the possession of a lot of red-skins.

His knowledge of traps and trapping had stood him in good need; he had accumulated fur enough to permit him to retire from the business with a competence that would place him beyond toil and want.

We need not describe the feelings with which the occupants of the isolated cabin awaited the attack they both expected.

Not a sound disturbed the vigils of the night, and Old Tomahawk ascended to the loft more than once, and peering through the crevices in the roof, saw the stars that beautified the cloudless sky.

"It kinder mystifies me," he said, at last. "This stillness doesn't mean that Mountain Pete an' his red pards have said 'Good-by, Trapper Tom,' an' gone home. Tell that half-

blood whar thar's a dressed beaver-hide, an' he'll get it er lose his hair!"

The light that dimly illumined Trapper Tom's cabin burned low, and was not revived when it at last bade the two friends adieu.

The long night at last drew to a close, and the boy trapper hailed the first gray streaks of dawn with a cry of delight.

"Morning! Look, Tomahawk! We will know something now."

Sure enough, morning had come again.

Trapper Tom's first bound was to a crack between the logs, and soon he was eagerly surveying the premises outside.

"They have gone, sure enough!" he exclaimed. "Tomahawk, there isn't an Indian in sight."

An investigation by the old Indian-hunter proved the truth of the boy's observation, but the door was not unbarred nor was the vigilance for a moment relaxed.

The light grew stronger as the day advanced, and the sharp eyes of the boy trapper perceived a dark-red line that extended from the cabin toward the river.

This was undoubtedly the blood-trail of Young Eagle, the Sioux whom he had wounded in the encounter in the hut.

Trapper Tom felt a fierce triumph tugging at his heart-strings while his eyes followed the red trail; he had cut the young Indian deeply, yet he yearned to follow the trail to the end.

The sun came up and dissipated the last shadows of night; it showed Trapper Tom and Old Tomahawk the surroundings of the cabin, but not a red-skin did it reveal.

"Mebbe they have departed, but not for long," said the lank Indian-hunter. "What have you got for breakfast?"

This question carried the Wood Imp to his backwoods larder, whose contents consisted at that moment of some excellent bear-meat, a wild turkey, and a haunch of cold venison.

With this spread before them, the two friends ate a hearty breakfast, for the vigils of the night just passed had sharpened their appetites.

"Now," said Old Tomahawk, as he settled back from the feast, "I'll tell you a funny story before Mountain Pete an' his pards come back. When I asked you if you found a stake in one corner of this cabin when you took possession of it, you looked at me an' yer eyes said: 'Is Old Tomahawk crazy?' Wal, I'm not crazy now, boy, ef I war once. About ten years ago I war prospectin' somewhar, an' I run across a vein ov gold that war a dandy. I war alone, but the gold war to be had fur the pickin' up. Now, you'll open yer eyes afore I git through; but I'm ready to swear to every word I say. Wal, whar I found the gold I built a cabin an' stayed thar awhile till I had accumulated nuggets enough to place Old Tomahawk forever beyond want. I built my cabin, I recollect, right over the mouth ov ther shaft I had sunk, an' had the secret all to myself. At last I concluded to go back to whar I had started from, so I covered ther mouth of the shaft, drove a stake in one corner of the shanty, covered up all traces of gold, an' pulled out.

"On my way back I war captured by a lot of Sioux who tied me to an unbroken horse an'

gave the animile the whip. Heaven knows whar that mad critter didn't run to. When I came to my senses whar do you think I war? I war lyin' on a board in a minin'-camp away down in Colorado, an' ther miners had tied me fast to prevent me from wand'rin' off. I had been thar fer three months, crazy as a loon all the time, talkin' about a gold-mine, an' tryin' ter draw a map ov the route to it on the ground. I say that war nigh ten years ago, Trapper Tom. Since that time I've tried a thousand times to find that shanty, but my mind's furgot the route. I can't tell what the shanty looks like, but I do know that I planted a stake in one corner, an' nothin' more. Of late I've given up all thoughts of ever seein' it again, an' took to huntin' the Sioux that tied me to that horse. Somewhar that cabin stands to-day, an' under it is a gold mine that would create a sensation. I've heard ov lone cabins in the mountains, an' I've tramped to every one; but no stake in the corner. It's been disapp'ntment year arter year. When I think too hard my head aches an' I feel as if ther crazy spell war comin' back. That's why I asked you last night, boy, whether thar war a stake in one corner of this shanty when you came here. Old Tomahawk's story is a queer one, don't you think? but every word is as true as preachin'."

The old fellow ceased and his eyes wandered first to one corner and then to another.

His story and his manner of telling it had impressed Trapper Tom.

"I'd like to help you hunt your lost gold mine," he said.

"It's no use. That shanty is lost ferever. Some day a storm will tear it to pieces an' a lot ov red greasers will find the bonanza; but to Old Tomahawk it is forever lost. If I only could remember the shape ov the shanty an' the profile ov the kentry that surrounded it I might run across it some time; but these things have passed out ov my head. No. I guess I'll fight Injuns ther rest ov my life."

Old Tomahawk ended with a laugh, which was supplemented by the sharp crack of a rifle.

The next second Trapper Tom leaped to his feet and then staggered back, a red spot showing itself on his shoulder where the buckskin coat was torn.

"Winged!" cried Old Tomahawk, as he sprung to the boy's side, rifle in hand and eyes flashing madly. "I guess I know whose compliments that war."

By this time the boy trapper had recovered, and he opened his trapping-coat to see the mark of the bullet which had entered the cabin between two logs.

"Who fired that shot?" he cried between clinched teeth. "Was it that young Indian I cut?"

"No. Judgin' from the size ov this bullet, Trapper Tom. I'd call the shooter Mountain Pete," and Old Tomahawk held up to the boy's gaze a large bullet he had taken from its bed in the cabin wall.

CHAPTER V.

TRAPPER TOM'S GRIT.

THAT one sharp shot was followed by the most profound silence.

Old Tomahawk sprung from Trapper Tom's side to the chink, with a growl of rage similar to that which issues from the throat of a maddened tiger.

His eyes swept the scenery on the outside, but the figure of the man who had fired the shot was not to be seen.

"Just as I expected; the coward is afraid to show himself," he said after watching for a moment. "It was Mountain Pete—that's certain."

Trapper Tom by this time had examined his wound, which was a slight flesh one, although blood had flowed profusely, and now stood at Old Tomahawk's side with rifle cocked and a pair of eager eyes on the alert.

"Pshaw! what's the use ov watchin' fer 'em?" exclaimed the Indian-fighter in tones of disgust. "I hate a man what won't fight fair, an' that's why I despise Mountain Pete."

"We'll catch him yet," said the boy.

"I hope so. I've been wanting to lay hands on that hound fer years. I'd rather settle with him an' his pards than find the cabin with the stake in the corner."

Nothing more was said.

The sun came up, touched the meridian, and crept slowly down the decline toward the west.

Since morning nothing had occurred to disturb the serenity of the landscape that surrounded Trapper Tom's cabin.

It seemed as though an Indian foot had not pressed the ground for years.

"I'd like to know what's in my traps," said Trapper Tom as he watched the long shadows of the trees fall across his hut. "There was one beaver in them last night; there may be more, and I am anxious to increase my store of pelts."

"Better let them traps take keer ov them-selves," said Old Tomahawk.

"And lose my beaver?" cried the boy.

"Wal, yes."

"I'll never do that," was the firm response. "I'm going to see what my traps have caught."

"To night?"

"To night!"

Old Tomahawk looked at the Wood Imp, but made no reply.

"I know the way and Mountain Pete and his pards have no terrors for me," Trapper Tom said, looking up into the dark eyes of the old Indian-hater. "Woe to the rascals if they have meddled with my property. Tomahawk, I'm going to ask you to keep house till I come back. When the sun has fairly set, I'm off."

Still there was no answer.

Old Tomahawk leaned against the wall and appeared to be buried in thought.

"Maybe he's trying to locate the lost cabin," thought Trapper Tom. "Didn't he say awhile ago that when he thinks hard about it he feels like he's going back to insanity? I hope he'll never get that way again."

The little trapper hustled about and got ready to go to the bayou where he had set the beaver-traps.

He was curiously watched by the Indian-hunter who neither remonstrated, nor uttered a syllable.

The moment came and Trapper Tom, armed to the teeth, stepped to the door.

"Watch till I come back, Tomahawk," he said as the old hunter laid his hand on the barricades. "I'll bring traps and beaver, and, possibly, a scalp."

Then Old Tomahawk spoke. "Be keerful that you bring your own back," he said. "Whar yer traps ar' thar may be bigger game than beaver."

That was all.

The door was opened by the Indian-hater, and Trapper Tom glided across the threshold to hear the barricades replaced behind him.

The boy-trapper felt the situation in which he was placed.

More than two miles stretched between him and the bayou where he had left his traps the night before.

The sun had gone down and the forest that bordered the little stream was full of shadows, such as are sometimes cast by a watery moon.

The twigs bent but did not break beneath the trapper's feet for his steps were light, and at times he seemed to glide over the ground without the least noise.

He no longer mistrusted Old Tomahawk, but looked upon the Indian-hater as a friend whom he could trust in the hour of danger and need.

Trapper Tom took the straight cut to the bayou because he was eager to reach it and inspect his traps.

As he hurried along he kept ears and eyes on the alert, for he could not forget the villain whose bullet had nearly put an end to his life.

At last he saw the trees that fringed the basin loom up before him, and quickened his steps.

Three minutes later he was stooping over the first trap, attached to which he found a large, fat beaver, whose pelt would rejoice the eye of the trader.

It did not take him long to secure trap and animal to his back, then he hurried to the second trap which also held a beaver.

Trapper Tom for the moment forgot Mountain Pete and his friends, and thought only of the game he would display to Old Tomahawk on his return to the cabin.

"If the last trap is equally lucky, I will be satisfied!" he ejaculated.

A minute later he was kneeling over the third trap.

Another beaver!

Trapper Tom allowed an exclamation of joy to escape his lips as he drew the sleek but lifeless animal from the water, and with an air of triumph he swung the prize upon his back.

"Now for the old shanty!" he said. "I'll open Old Tomahawk's eyes with my luggage when I get back!"

He reached for the rifle he had placed against a tree while getting the last trap, but as his fingers touched it he heard a noise, and a figure fell astride his arm from the branches overhead.

Trapper Tom started back with a cry of horror.

"Indians!"

"Injuns an' worse!" was the response, as from every tree something human in shape, but

panther-like, dropped to the ground and surrounded him.

The first one had broken the Wood Imp's grip on his rifle, and too astonished to draw his revolver, he found himself in the center of a circle calculated to terrify the bravest hunter.

But the boy still clung to his traps and beaver.

"I know you!" he said fearlessly to the leader of the band, who towered before him like a giant. "You're the meanest human in these parts, and men have nicknamed you Mountain Pete!"

In response to this accusation there was a grin, and then a coarse, brutish laugh from the man addressed.

"Mountain Pete I am, my little chipper. Why don't you stay at home when I'm about? Got a good load ov fat beaver thar, I see—that's just what we want."

Trapper Tom instinctively recoiled a step at Mountain Pete's last words, so suggestive of forcible robbery.

He forgot that he was entirely surrounded—that there were Indians at his back as relentless as those in his front.

"Retreatin' won't save yer traps," Mountain Pete continued. "Just drop 'em on the ground without ceremony."

What! Give up his beaver to a lot of villainous Sioux, led by a dastardly renegade?

The thought lit up the boy trapper's eyes with a defiant flash.

"These beaver are mine!" he said.

"But we want 'em—don't you see?"

"Well, you can't have them!"

"Can't, hey, my chipper? We'll take what you've got hyer an' then help ourselves to all you've got at home!"

Mountain Pete strode toward Trapper Tom as the last words rung from his throat.

The dark-skinned renegade looked like a fiend incarnate, for the lightnings of greed and madness shot from his eyes.

"Traps an' beaver!—drop 'em!" he roared.

The next instant the precious game, with the traps to which it was still attached, dropped at the boy trapper's feet.

"That's sensible," said Pete. "Better give up yer traps than yer b'ar!"

Trapper Tom bit his lips at these words, and the next instant his foot was pressing down the springs of the traps.

He worked like one who thoroughly understood what he was doing and almost before one of the red circle could divine his object, he had jerked the three traps from the ground and was swinging them around his head!

"Take my beaver, but with the compliments of the traps that caught them!" fell from his lips as he started forward.

Mountain Pete saw the maddened boy's intention and threw up his hands to frustrate him, but too late.

Amid a rattle of chains, the heavy iron traps struck him full in the face, and, unable to keep his feet, so terrible was the blow dealt with Trapper Tom's entire strength, that he reeled back a pace and dropped to the ground!

The Wood Imp with an exulting cry leaped over the renegade's prostrate body, but with a score of yelling red-skins at his heels,

A dozen hands were thrust out to grasp him, but he was just beyond their reach, and whirling suddenly, he dashed the traps in the face of the foremost, sending him bleeding to the ground like a person struck fair by a pugilist.

This last stroke checked the yelling band for a moment and gave Trapper Tom a breathing-spell.

"Now for a run for my scalp!" he said to himself, and the next instant he wheeled and dashed through the forest like a deer!

It was, indeed, to be a race for life, for he had not executed three bounds ere he found the yelling miscreants at his heels.

One by one he threw the traps from him into the forest, then tightening his belt and loosening his revolver for an emergency which he hoped would never come, he summoned all his strength to his aid and taxed his racing powers to their utmost.

His goal was the cabin where he had left Old Tomahawk; but could he reach it?

He had run before, but never from a lot of Indians who wanted his scalp.

He had been chased by bears and wounded bucks, but now an enemy more relentless than either was in his wake, with yells that made the welkin ring, and with ready knife and tomahawk whetted for his skull.

On, on went the boy trapper, tearing through the woods, leaping logs and stumps like one mad.

Such an exciting chase those forest trails had never seen before.

But Trapper Tom's efforts seemed hopeless.

The red-skins came down upon him like a pack of wolves.

"We'll fight it out, then!" he suddenly exclaimed, and, wheeling suddenly, he confronted the yelling gang with outstretched revolver.

Instantly the foremost recoiled, but in spite of this the Wood Imp touched the trigger and a giant brave leaped into the air to fall back dead!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

FOR nearly a minute the undaunted boy stood erect and poured the contents of his revolver into the ranks of the red-skins.

The Sioux reeled from the deadly flashes, and several went to the ground with the leaden compliments of the boy trapper in their brain.

It was a wild scene, and one which the red survivors would not soon forget.

Such a fight, maintained on the boy's part against such terrible odds, could not last long.

He had driven the Indians back a few paces, but they would surely prove victors in the end.

Trapper Tom was not far from the cabin, near enough at least for Old Tomahawk to rush to his rescue, if so disposed; but the giant Indian-hunter did not show himself.

Suddenly the red-skins and the little trapper seemed to meet.

They actually came together, and in the twinkling of an eye the boy's arm was knocked down, the weapon torn from his grasp, and he was overpowered by a dozen infuriated red demons.

The battle was over, and Trapper Tom realized his danger when he found himself a prisoner with four dead Indians on the ground at his feet, appealing mutely to the living to avenge their death.

In the midst of the menacing knives and tomahawks, and the mad, glaring eyes of his captors, the little beaver-catcher stood erect and gave them look for look like a hero.

He fully expected to be brained on the spot, but the Indians, instead of treating him thus, started back toward the bayou, from whose shores his race for life had begun.

"White boy go back to where he hit the Yellow Chief," said a dozen voices, in response to Tom's questioning look.

"Which means that I am to confront Mountain Pete, the villain whom I felled with the traps," thought the boy. "I will not meet with a very cordial reception, but I guess I can stand the interview."

As the distance from the place of his capture to the spot where he had left Mountain Pete senseless on the ground was not great, he was soon confronted by the dark giant whose face already swollen rendered him in aspect more ferocious than ever.

His eyes seemed to become balls of fire as they alighted on Trapper Tom.

"Caught you, did they, young tiger?" he exclaimed as a stride carried him to where the beaver-catcher stood watched by the red-skins. "Look at my face! It is your infernal work—the compliments ov your beaver-traps! I'm Mountain Pete, more'n half wildcat. I've a notion ter skin yer alive!"

These ferocious sentences were hissed from the depths of the renegade's heart.

He towered like a mountain above the boy, and threatened to fall upon him and crush him at any moment.

Without a quaver Trapper Tom faced the forest desperado, and gave him look for look.

The anger of Mountain Pete increased.

He raved, beat the air with his fists, and once or twice laid his hands on Trapper Tom's shoulders and shook him till his teeth chattered.

"Tie the young imp to yon tree!" he suddenly thundered to the red-skins. "Never mind his feet. Tie him by his hands only, and give him five feet ov rope. I want to see the young daisy dance."

Trapper Tom knew what these words meant.

He was to be whipped by the giant, unmercifully flogged until, perhaps, lacerated by the cutting withes, he should fall at his torturer's feet dead.

Eager to do Mountain Pete's bidding, the Sioux carried the Wood Imp to the tree designated by the desperado's finger, and in less than five minutes he was secured to it by a lariat which bound his wrists together, and allowed him five feet of cord.

"Now cut open his jacket on the back and get me a dozen good withes."

Mountain Pete took a fiend's delight in issuing these commands.

Need we say that they were promptly obeyed?

A keen knife that had no respect for Trapper Tom's flesh ripped open his trapping-coat on the

back, and exposed the white skin to the eyes of the bloodthirsty crowd.

A dozen long switches had been thrown at Mountain Pete's feet, and selecting one, he raised it suddenly aloft and bade the red-skins stand back.

As the whip cut the air and was about to descend upon the little trapper's back, he threw a look over his shoulder and caught the dark giant's eye.

"What means that look?" demanded Mountain Pete lowering the whip and striding to the boy's side.

"Interpret it as you please," was the reply.

"It means vengeance, doesn't it, boy?"

Trapper Tom's lips shut hard but there was no reply.

"When I'm through with you, I'll not be afraid ov yer vengeance," laughed the renegade coarsely. "When I whip a man he never hurts anybody afterwards."

Again Mountain Pete stepped back and once more up went the whip.

"Drop that stick!" rung suddenly through the forest in tones that startled every one.

The Indians with one accord wheeled toward that point of the compass from whence the sound had come.

"Who said that?" demanded Mountain Pete.

"A man what has sworn that that boy sha'n't be whipped," was the response.

"Who ar' you?"

"Your better, Mountain Pete! Throw down that stick!"

There was a menace in the command, but the renegade hesitated.

The Indians and all who looked could almost see the speaker.

If the moon had been full and bright, they could have distinguished his figure despite the shadows of the trees.

"I ought to know that voice," murmured Mountain Pete, and then he turned to the boy trapper with the inquiry. "Do you know that interferer, boy?"

Of course Trapper Tom knew the voice which had spoken among the forest trees, and at the first word his heart had leaped for joy.

Old Tomahawk was out there, and though the beaver-catcher could not see him, he could picture him erect with his deadly repeating rifle at his shoulder while he covered Mountain Pete.

"Do you know that man out thar? Speak!" thundered the renegade at Trapper Tom's ear.

"Ov course he knows me," came the response from where the interferer stood. "We've j'ined hands in friendship and Old Tomahawk's goin' ter do his part."

"Old Tomahawk!"

Mountain Pete fairly recoiled as he uttered the Indian hunter's name.

"Know me, I see!" laughed Old Tomahawk. "Now, will you drop that stick?"

The trimmed bough which had not got to touch the boy trapper's flesh fell to the ground followed by an oath from Mountain Pete's lips.

"Now, cut the little clipper loose."

This command seemed too much for the Indians who had not forgotten that four of their

comrades had fallen by Trapper Tom's revolver."

"Stand back you red cut-throats, er I'll shoot my way to whar he stands!" cried Old Tomahawk. "By Jehosaphat! I'm worse than two minute p'isen when I'm stirred up. What ar' you goin' to do?"

"Give him the youngster," said Mountain Pete in low tones intended only for the ears of the incensed Indians. "We can get him ag'in when we want 'im. Old Tomahawk has the drop on ther hull lot ov us, an' he is p'isen when he's r'iled. More'n one Injun knows this."

The question was suddenly settled by a stalwart red-skin who leaped toward Trapper Tom knife in hand, and the glittering blade descended not into the boy's bosom, but upon the lariat and the little trapper stepped back free.

"Thet's sensible," said Old Tomahawk who seemed to possess the eyes of an owl. "Come this way, boy. I've got the drop on the hull crowd."

Trapper Tom started toward his rescuer, but the following moment, with a wild yell of defiance and resistance, a young Indian threw himself in his path.

"Young Eagle is here!" pealed from the newcomer's throat. "The white trapper's knife did not find his heart in his cabin. He shall not go to the scalper who calls him in the forest, but he and Young Eagle will fight again."

Trapper Tom had already recognized the speaker as the young Sioux with whom he had had a scuffle in his cabin, an event already described, and he fully expected to be charged at once by the infuriated red-skin.

"Get out ov the way thar, an' let that young chap out," called out Old Tomahawk to Young Eagle who was standing his ground with flashing eyes.

"He shall not escape Young Eagle's hand!" was the answer.

The next second there rung out the sharp report of a rifle and the boy Sioux reeled away as the knife he clutched dropped from his hand.

Trapper Tom saw his opportunity, and before the startled crowd could interfere or detain him he was bounding toward Old Tomahawk like a deer.

The effect of the shot was electrical.

Just as the boy trapper reached his rescuer, a dozen rifles launched their contents after him, but the balls whistled harmlessly over his head or buried themselves in the trees near by.

"A close shave, eh, Trapper Tom?" ejaculated Old Tomahawk, as he received the little beaver-catcher. "Whar's yer traps an' yer beaver—but above all, whar's yer rifle?"

In a word, almost, Trapper Tom told the story of his unlucky journey to his traps.

"Lost 'em all, I see," said the Indian-fighter. "Wal, you've got more. That young red turned up when you didn't look for 'im? I've hed things occur that way fer me. We'll go back now. Woe to them reds of they foller!"

The last sentence was spoken in tones calculated for other ears than Trapper Tom's, and the old scalper and his pard turned their faces toward the cabin.

Though the Indians wanted their blood, they did not bound after them like a pack of wolves.

A man—a giant called Mountain Pete—held them back.

"Let 'em go," he said. "We'll win at the end ov the game. What's a man an' a boy ag'in' twenty men like us?"

Old Tomahawk and Trapper Tom reached the old cabin without molestation, and the boy had scarcely crossed the threshold ere a hand encircled his arm.

"I've made a diskivery, boy, an' I'll strike a light an' show you," said the scalper.

Trapper Tom stood still with a great deal of difficulty, but a moment after a light had been struck he uttered an exclamation of amazement.

There was a large hole in one corner of the cabin.

"The long lost shanty, Tomahawk?" he cried, as he bounded to it.

Old Tomahawk smiled assent.

CHAPTER VII.

DARK SUSPICIONS.

If it was true that the Indian-fighter had rediscovered the long-lost gold-mine, then, indeed, would the cabin be defended to the last extremity.

Trapper Tom could scarcely credit his senses as he gazed into the pit over which Old Tomahawk held the light, while there was a broad grin on his face.

"You had hardly got to yer traps when I made up my mind ter search under this shanty," he said. "You hed told me that thar warn't a stake in one ov the corners when you came here, but I resolved to hunt anyhow. I began in that corner over thar, but the hunt didn't pan out very well, so I came to this one. All at once, boy, I struck a board that warn't altogether decayed an' I knew at once I had hit a lead ov some kind. The next minute I went down into a hole up to my waist an' then sunk cl'ar out ov sight. This is the old shanty, an' no mistake, Trapper Tom. How would you like to trade yer pelts for this bonanza?"

The young beaver-catcher laughed at Old Tomahawk's idea, and glanced slyly at the precious skins piled up in one corner of the hut.

"The reason I didn't hear you shoot is because I war in the mine at that time," continued Old Tomahawk. "When I had made sure that I hed found the old cabin, I locked up an' started arter you with the good news. I imagine that I got to the bayou just in the nick ov time."

"That you did, Tomahawk, and I'm thankful for your assistance. Without it Mountain Pete would have used his switches on my bare back with terrible effect."

"Wal, he would! That villain don't know what mercy is. I know ov an Injun wife what war whipped to death once, an' he warn't a thousand miles off when the deed war done, either."

"Not so bad as that, I hope."

"Wait till you know 'im better and you won't doubt," said Old Tomahawk. "But see here. We'll hide the mouth ov the mine for the present. When we have some leisure on our hands we'll explore it together. I mustn't forget that I'm here on business—hunting Injuns."

I want scalps, and when I should have fifty I have but one. It's a shame, Trapper Tom."

At Old Tomahawk's suggestion the two companions set to work and concealed the opening in the earth by covering it carefully with boards upon which were piled the pelts.

When the work was completed everything looked so natural that nobody would have suspected that the valuable skins hid everything, but a small portion of the cabin floor.

It was now getting on toward midnight and Old Tomahawk proposed that Trapper Tom should take a nap while he guarded the cabin and its treasures.

To this the boy at first objected, but when the Indian-fighter told him that a nap in the fore part of the night would prepare him for guard duty in the after part, he took a new rifle to the couch he was to occupy and lay down on his couch of skins.

For a while he kept awake talking in low tones to Old Tomahawk who had taken up a station near the door where he could bear the slightest movement by a foe outside, but at last sleep asserted its powers, and the figure of the old Sioux hater faded from his vision.

Whether Trapper Tom was disturbed by dreams or not, he awoke at the end of an hour and found the interior of the cabin wrapped in darkness.

When he fell asleep a light was burning on the rough table that the room contained, and Old Tomahawk's ungainly shadow lay on the cabin wall, but now he could not see his hand when placed before his face, and the stillness was weird-like and most profound.

The Wood Imp at first thought nothing of all this.

He believed that Old Tomahawk had let the light go out, and that he—the Indian-fighter—was somewhere in the cabin with every sense on the alert.

For several minutes the boy trapper listened attentively.

"I don't hear the old fellow breathe," he said to himself. "It cannot be that he has fallen asleep. He said—"

Trapper Tom paused abruptly and held his breath.

A very distinct whisper had come down from above.

Instantly, but without noise, Trapper Tom rose from the couch with his right hand touching the hilt of his hunting-knife.

"There's somebody in the loft," he said to himself, and then he repeated his companion's name several times in cautious tones, but received no response.

"He is not here; he is in the loft and it was his voice I heard," he thought as his indignation rose. "This is the man who has promised me friendship! For all I know, he may be in league with somebody not much better than Mountain Pete."

Trapper Tom, at this time, was groping about in the darkness with an object in view.

All at once his fingers touched the ladder that communicated with the loft.

"I'll see about this whispering in the garret," he said as he went upward, round over round, with the knife still clutched in his hand.

It was an exciting moment for Trapper Tom, for he did not know who he might encounter amid the darkness of the garret.

He was certain that he had heard a human voice there, and now that Old Tomahawk was not to be found in the main room of the cabin, he believed that the voice was that worthy's.

He did not pause; more than one-half of his body was above the opening, and then he listened intently, for looking was out of the question.

"He's only a boy, but he's got the grit ov a man," he heard a voice say, in tones so distinct that he believed he could have touched the speaker with an outstretched hand. "I'm goin' ter stay with 'im a while yet. Skins? I never saw such beaver-pelts in all my life. He's got a lay-out down-stairs that'd set a tradin'-post crazy. You oughter see 'em, Owen."

Owen!

Trapper Tom started at the name spoken by Old Tomahawk.

There was a conspiracy against him.

Old Tomahawk had told a partner about the value of his hides, and for a moment he felt like sending a bullet through the old Indian-fighter's head.

"Go down, now, an' come to ther front door," continued Old Tomahawk. "It wouldn't do fer ye to git into the shanty the way the Sioux got out last night. When you knock I'll waken Tom an' tell 'im that a friend ov mine is at the door. He'll trust me, an' we'll be together to ther end ov the trail. I'm glad ye'r' here, Owen. Now go 'round to the door."

With this last word Trapper Tom slid down the ladder and threw himself upon the couch he had just left.

He believed that he had caught Old Tomahawk in an act of treachery, and he resolved to thwart it.

"You don't catch me napping, you old curmudgeon!" he grated. "I will see whether Owen, whoever he is, gets in here to-night. Be careful, Old Tomahawk, or you will never get to work the mine you have rediscovered."

He now heard Old Tomahawk descending the ladder, and pretended to be asleep, in order to let the Indian-hater carry out a part of the programme.

The reader may imagine the impatience with which the boy trapper waited for the pre-arranged signal.

Suddenly it was heard so distinctly that Trapper Tom almost sprung from his couch.

"Who's thar?" he heard Old Tomahawk say, as his figure glided to the door.

There was a reply in tones which the boy trapper could not distinguish.

"Pard," suddenly said Old Tomahawk, as his hand swooping downward in the darkness fell on the boy's arm. "Pard, thar's a friend outside."

Trapper Tom was on his feet in a moment.

"Whose friend?" he asked.

"Yours and mine."

"More yours than mine, eh, Old Tomahawk?"

"P'r'aps."

"That's what I thought. Tell him that he can't come in!"

The Wood Imp spoke in resolute tones, and if the scalper could have seen his eyes at that moment, he would not have wondered at the voice.

"I say let that fellar in. He's a host in himself, Tom," he said. "We may need him afore long."

Old Tomahawk passed Trapper Tom on his way to the cabin-door, but the boy sprung from the bit of candle he had just lit and clutched his arm.

"You forget that I'm master here yet," he said, meeting Old Tomahawk's gaze. "I say that Owen sha'n't come in!"

The Indian-hater's look instantly became a stare.

"Great Jehosaphat! who told you that Owen war out thar?" he exclaimed.

"You! You told him to go round to the front door five minutes ago."

"Then you hevn't been asleep all the time?"

"No."

The next moment, Old Tomahawk laughed.

"Wal, if you heard me talkin' up in the loft, it's all right, Trapper Tom," he said, with what the boy would have designated brazen impudence. "Owen's a boy what can be trusted. Let me introduce you to him."

The speaker's hand was on the barricades, but Trapper Tom, summoning all his strength, pushed him back.

"Owen shall stay out!" he cried. "I'm convinced that if he's a friend of yours he is none of mine. This door sha'n't be opened!"

The eyes of the Wood Imp seemed to emit sparks of fire, and he increased an inch in stature while he faced the astonished trailer, determination depicted on every lineament.

"What's got into you?" cried Old Tomahawk. "It hasn't been forty-eight hours since you said you'd trust me through thick an' thin. Was I a traitor while I war savin' you from Mountain Pete's whips? Do I look like a spy an' a traitor? If you won't let Owen in, open the door an' let Old Tomahawk out!"

Trapper Tom did not move.

"You were whispering to that person in the loft when I awoke," he said.

"So I war. Owen came unexpectedly an' war comin' in by the roof when I diskivered him. Let me out. Owen an' me kin tramp off together, an' you kin take keer ov yer pelts yerself."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed the boy trapper. "I'll stay here alone and defend my property to the bitter end."

He turned to the door and was about to let his gaunt ally out when he heard a voice that withheld his hands.

"Keep the door shut for Heaven's sake! I'll come in another way. The red wolves have come again!"

The voice ceased and Old Tomahawk looked into the boy's face.

"Thet's Owen," he whispered. "Before long you'll be glad to trust him."

Trapper Tom made no reply.

CHAPTER VIII. IN THE GOLD CAVE.

LET US see whether the mysterious Owen told the truth when he said that the red wolves,

meaning of course the Sioux, had come back.

If Old Tomahawk and Trapper Tom had inaugurated a scout they would have discovered a number of shadowy figures among the trees that grew about the cabin.

There were more than twenty in number, naked to the waist, and quite ferocious in aspect.

Owen made good his escape, and just in time to save his own scalp, for he had not left the hut more than five minutes ere five creeping figures approached the door by crawling and listened intently at the threshold.

"White people inside and awake," whispered one as all arose to their feet. "We make 'em talk now."

An instant later a short club in the hands of one of the Indians struck the door.

"White trappers talk fast; Injun mad!" he exclaimed. "Red braves thicker than the leaves on the trees. Does the beaver-catcher listen?"

"I hear you," answered Trapper Tom who stood near the door, rifle in hand and a finger at the trigger. "Do you know tht you're risking your life standing where you are? I can send a bullet through the door."

"Door thick an' Injun thin," was the bantering answer. "Will the boy trapper fight against the biggest braves of the Sioux nation?"

"For my rights, yes! The size of my enemies does not daunt me. You can't have my pelts."

"Injun goin' to get 'em. Will the beaver-catcher open his door?"

"No."

A moment's silence followed the reply and then a dozen war-clubs seemed to rain blows upon the door.

At the same time the air resounded with yells as if the red-skins were holding a carnival in front of the doomed cabin.

"I'll put an end to that dance!" said Trapper Tom, as he stepped back a pace and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

Old Tomahawk waited for the shot with a smile on his lips.

It was not delayed, for all at once the interior of the cabin was filled with the report of a rifle, and the ball that crashed through the door produced a wild yell of pain and put an instant stop to the savage dance going on before the hut.

"Thet fixed one ov 'em!" cried the scalphunter. "But we mustn't forget that thar's many a one left. What ar' they up to now?"

Old Tomahawk put his eye to the hole made by the bullet and surveyed the scene in front of the cabin for a few moments.

"Nary an Injun out thar," he said, withdrawing from the door. "To be sure, thar ain't much moon, but I'm used to seeing arter night. They've gone off with the red devil you winged, boy, but it'll be a mighty brief respite."

Trapper Tom was ready to believe the concluding part of Old Tomahawk's last sentence.

Yes, brief would be the respite.

Ten minutes of inaction passed away, and

then the Indian-fighter, who had returned to the bullet-hole, uttered an exclamation which carried Tom to his side.

"They've got a fire-ball!" he said. "Here they come with it."

These words were enough to strike terror to the heart of the bravest.

Trapper Tom took one look through the bullet-hole, which, small as it was, showed him the enemy with which they had to contend.

A ball of fire, apparently five feet in diameter and blazing fiercely, was being pushed toward the cabin by a lot of Indians with poles or sticks ten feet in length.

Now and then their bodies were visible, but only for a moment, and not long enough to admit of any one taking aim at them.

If the fiery ball was pushed against the cabin door, and allowed to remain there, it would soon do its work, and the hideous triumph of the Indians would be complete.

What was to be done?

Nearer and nearer came the fire ball, gaining destructive strength with each revolution, and the Indians, believing their scheme successful, were yelling like a set of demons.

Old Tomahawk watched the blazing monster with flashing eyes and compressed lips.

"It'll take 'em twenty minutes to burn down the door," he suddenly exclaimed. "Before that time ends we'll be out ov harm's way."

"How so?"

At that moment the fiery mass struck the door, and some dark smoke rushed into the cabin through several crevices.

"To the mine!" said old Tomahawk. "You must not forget, Trapper Tom, that this is the shanty in which I planted the stake ten years ago."

The Indian-fighter now began to remove the valuable pelts piled in one corner and being helped by Trapper Tom, this duty was quickly performed.

The mouth of the gold mine was revealed by their work, and a moment later Old Tomahawk was hurling bundle after bundle of skins down the shaft.

All this time the fire-ball was blazing against the door of the cabin to the delight of a score of dancing Indians whose wild yells made the welkin ring.

"Yell on, you red rascals!" vociferated Old Tomahawk. "When you trade one ov them skins for fire-water, just let us know."

"Quick!" cried the boy trapper at that moment. "The door is cracking. It won't hold out another minute. And they are preparing to assault it, too!"

"Let 'em charge! I'm ready," was the retort. "Now jump into the hole, pard. The first landin' ain't far an' you'll land on the skins besides."

Trapper Tom did not hesitate, and with a swift glance at the door he leaped into the cavernous opening and fell on the skins which had preceded him.

He heard overhead as he descended the coarse laugh of Old Tomahawk whom he had left behind, and then came a warning for him to step aside.

The following moment the figure of the old

Indian-hater landed at the boy's side, and then came a crash, and the opening was filled with a shower of sparks.

"They've bursted the door in an' it's fallen over the hole. Good for thet!" ejaculated Old Tomahawk. "They'll suspect thet we've escaped by the roof. Now we'll tote the pelts an' ourselves ahead to the mine proper whar I'll show you something."

The task proposed by the Indian-fighter was not one easy of accomplishment.

A narrow and low ceiled corridor ran from the place where the twain had landed.

It was dark as Egypt, but they managed to push the pelts ahead of them until the passage widened, and they found themselves in a chamber whose walls they could not touch with outstretched hands.

"Have you a match, boy?"

Trapper Tom felt in his pocket and produced one of the few lucifers that remained of the stock he had brought from the nearest mining-camp when he set out to try his fortunes on the trapping-grounds.

The little light that followed Old Tomahawk's stroke revealed nothing, but a better one was soon produced, and Trapper Tom uttered an exclamation of surprise.

He found himself in a veritable underground cavern which looked as though it had been cut by the hands of man.

The walls were rough, and the ceiling he could not reach with his hands.

The floor was covered with loose rocks, which to his eyes resembled quartz, so that he was not surprised when Old Tomahawk pronounced them gold-bearing nuggets.

"I'll go back an' see what the imps ar' up to," said the Indian-fighter, and thrusting the stump of the torch into a crack in the wall to afford the boy trapper some light, he glided toward the mouth of the shaft.

He was not long in disappearing and Trapper Tom found himself alone.

He looked with triumph upon the bundle of skins that lay at his feet.

He counted them again and again to find that not one pelt was missing, and his gaze would always revert to the traps which they had brought along.

For ten minutes he stood among his treasure, waiting for Old Tomahawk's return.

The yells of the Indians had ceased to ring in his ears, and he tried to believe that, failing to find him in the cabin, they had taken their departure, headed no doubt by that villain of villains, Mountain Pete.

Confirming himself at last in this belief, Trapper Tom seated himself on one of the bundles of beaver pelts and fell to examining the rocks that littered the floor.

Was he really in the gold mine which had been lost for ten years? and would he and Old Tomahawk be able to become real friends and partners?

He could not forget the conversation he had overheard between Old Tomahawk and the person called Owen.

Who was Owen?

Was he a young red-skin with an English name; or a white man like the Sioux-hater?

These questions and others similar might have continued to puzzle Trapper Tom's brain for some time, if the sound of a footstep had not startled him.

To look up was to spring erect, and the click of his rifle-lock was heard as he executed the movement.

He looked toward the mouth of the mine, whither Old Tomahawk had disappeared.

One look was enough.

There was advancing upon him an Indian whose eyes burned green in the light of the torch.

As Trapper Tom threw his rifle to his shoulder, the red-skin, with a cry of rage, came bounding toward him.

He had but one second of time at his command.

Quick as a flash he covered the painted Sioux, and as the Indian reached the muzzle of his rifle, he touched the trigger with an inward prayer for success.

The report that followed was dull and horrible.

An Indian, with his head blown away, reeled from the muzzle of the Wood Imp's rifle, and fell quivering to the ground!

Trapper Tom had not fired a moment too soon.

But the worst had not yet come.

Scarcely had the Sioux touched the floor of the gold cave, ere a yell was heard nearer the mouth of the corridor.

"My God! more Indians and in the mine!" fell from the boy's lips. "If I am to fight them let it be in darkness."

A mad bound carried him to the torch which he jerked from the wall and beat against the rocks until it was extinguished, and darkness filled the place.

"We're on an equal footing now," he said, feeling for his knife, and assuring himself that it was safe. "I am sure that I am left alone. Old Tomahawk has fallen into the clutches of the Indians. Four days ago I did not dream of such times as these."

The fact that the Indian he had shot had entered the cavern by the corridor was proof to his mind that he had been forcibly deprived of Old Tomahawk, his ally.

He stood in the midst of his pelts knife in hand and with ears on the alert.

He expected an attack at any moment and braced himself to receive it.

More than once he thought he detected the sound of footsteps, but as the moments passed without bringing on the expected assault, his spirits revived.

All at once one of the bundle of pelts moved at his feet.

Eager to save it, Trapper Tom stooped and put forth his hand.

An instant later it came in contact with a living wrist, and he sprung erect still grasping the prize he had secured.

It was a thrilling moment.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK.

The boy trapper imagined that he could see the figure of the red-skin by whom he was con-

fronted, but owing to the darkness that prevailed in the gold cave, of course he could not actually do this.

For a moment the Indian submitted to Trapper Tom's grasp, and then with a sudden jerk he wrenched himself loose.

"White trapper no hold Young Eagle!" he exclaimed.

The Wood Imp started at the sound of the voice, and at the name just spoken.

The red-skin before him was Young Eagle, the Sioux buck, an enemy whom he had already encountered, and he felt that the meeting in the dark would prove a duel to the death.

"I am ready for you," he exclaimed. "I did not get to finish you in the cabin, but we can fight it out here."

Once more Trapper Tom braced himself to receive a charge he believed to be imminent, and for several minutes he stood in mute expectancy among his furs.

But Young Eagle did not seem disposed to renew the combat in such gloom as that which surrounded them, and Trapper Tom was compelled to wait in vain.

At last he heard the Sioux moving off, and lowering the knife he stooped and inspected his pelts.

To his surprise one of the most valuable bundles had been abstracted, and the boy trapper ground his teeth while he thought of it.

The thought of losing a part of his winter's toil sent the blood like a current of molten lava through his veins.

"That Indian shall disgorge!" he grated. "I will not be robbed with impunity. No red-skin shall take from me the skins I have trapped for all winter. I have been robbed enough already."

But how to find Young Eagle?—that was the question.

Trapper Tom was now confident that the savage he had killed and the young buck were the only ones who had entered the gold cave; but there was no telling how soon others would find their way to it until the cavern should swarm with red-skins.

Still in the midst of this uncertainty he resolved to recover and keep all his property.

During the illumination of the cave by the torch he had noticed an offset which offered concealment for his furs, and he believed that he could find it despite the gloom.

"I'll try it," he mentally ejaculated. "Let me put my furs out of the way, and then I'll hunt that red-buck down."

Picking up his pelts, Trapper Tom started out on the hunt of the niche, and, as if guided by a friend, he found it without incident.

An exclamation of joy almost fell from his lips.

Feeling along the walls of the niche he discovered a natural shelf wide enough to receive the furs, and they were laid upon it.

"I'm ready for the hunt now," said Trapper Tom. "Woe to the young buck if I run across him!"

He was about to leave the niche when a strange noise from behind made him turn in that direction.

"What was that?" he asked. "Is this opening more than a niche?"

The questions were answered before he could draw another breath, for all at once a fierce growl smote his ears, and some large animal shot past his head, so near that his cap was carried to the ground.

Trapper Tom staggered back with an ejaculation of horror on his tongue.

"Great heavens! a panther!" he cried.

The dark walls of the gold cave echoed back the mad growl of the unseen beast.

Tom knew that it had missed him in its spring, but it was liable to repeat the operation at any moment, and the next time with better success.

The presence of the panther in the cavern was enough to daunt the Wood Imp; but he resolved to meet the new danger firmly, and to conquer if victory were possible.

He picked up his rifle and tried to make out the shining eyes of the panther, but there was no light in the cavern, and he was unable to do so.

"I'm going to settle this matter one way or the other," he said, firmly, taking a match from his pocket. "The Indian may discover me, but better that than to be menaced in the dark by a panther."

The next moment he drew the lucifer across a stone, and when it began to burn with some brilliancy, held it above his head.

At first he saw nothing, but all at once he noticed the panther crouched on the ground about fifteen feet away, his eyes shining like mad stars, and his tail moving uneasily on the ground behind him.

It was a sight that sent a thrill through every fiber of the boy's frame!

This was not all the burning match revealed.

Hugging the wall of the cavern, and not more than six feet beyond the panther was Young Eagle, the Sioux, anxiety and terror depicted on his countenance.

The arrival of the panther had undoubtedly interrupted a duel to the death, for Young Eagle's position told Trapper Tom that he was advancing upon him when the leap occurred.

The Wood Imp had no more than seen this tableau ere his match went out.

He laid the rifle aside, drew his revolver, and struck another lucifer.

His only hope seemed to be in the speedy death of the panther.

As the match flared up, he leveled the revolver and took deliberate aim at the crouching beast.

His safety depended on the success of that shot.

The beast seemed to divine the boy's intention, and was about to spring through the air and land upon him, when the revolver spoke.

"Hi!" ejaculated Trapper Tom, as a terrific howl filled the gold cave, and the panther tumbled backward.

"The panther is hit, white boy, but he still lives!" said the Indian. "His teeth are sharp and his claws are strong."

Trapper Tom already knew that his shot had failed to kill the panther, and that he had rendered it more desperate by wounding it.

He saw the animal writhing on the ground and clawing the air in its agony, while the In-

dian looked on with a knife in his hand, ready to defend himself against the beast.

Suddenly the panther bounded into the air and came down within five feet of the boy trapper, who involuntarily retreated.

"Shoot! shoot!" called out the red-skin.

At that moment Trapper Tom's match went out and he threw it away.

Still the expiring flame had showed him the position of the wounded animal, and hastily raising his revolver he fired another shot.

The cave was filled with the noise of the report, and the boy was not permitted to learn the result of his shot, for the next second something struck him a stunning blow on the breast and he went backward.

The panther had leaped upon him!

He instinctively dropped his revolver and drew his knife once more.

The panther seemed to be crushing the life out of him, yet he managed to strike several blows, each one of which carried the knife beneath the beast's yellowish hide.

It was a terrible fight in the dark for life, and the odds were against the boy trapper.

Never before had he been called upon to battle so desperately for that which was so dear to him, and he resolved while he fought to sell his life as dearly as possible.

He felt the teeth of the animal in his shoulder, but from his uncomfortable position on the ground he maintained the unequal combat, striking desperate blows with the knife.

At last one of his hands found the panther's throat, and as he wrenched his hold loose he got in a lucky stroke which sent a quiver through the panther's body.

The stab was as vital as it was fortunate.

The beast fell to one side, and Trapper Tom, releasing its throat, got upon his feet as quick as he could.

He felt weak and exhausted, but there was joy in his heart, for he knew that the maddened panther had been put out of harm's way.

"I'm victor, thank Heaven!" he exclaimed.

"Now I suppose I will be attacked by that young Indian who stole my furs, and who now wants my scalp."

He spoke in tones that produced an echo, and a moment later they met with a response.

Trapper Tom heard a quick footstep and then a number of voices.

"Heavens! the cave is filling with Indians!" dropped from his tongue.

This was even so, and although he could not see a single form, certain sounds told him that he had judged rightly.

He stood against the wall of the niche in which he had so bravely battled with the panther, and heard sounds terrible enough to test the courage of the most undaunted.

"Where are the white trapper and his furs?" sounded throughout the gold cave.

"Here we are!" grated Trapper Tom, defiantly. "Here we are, you merciless red devils. Weak as I am I am ready to meet you all."

The boy had to stand his ground, for there was a wall of stone behind him.

He awaited the discovery with breathless excitement, ready for the fray.

But before it came a noise sounded overhead,

from whence the panther made his first leap, and as Trapper Tom turned, a human hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Come up here, white boy," said a voice.
"Who are you?" asked Trapper Tom.
"Owen!"

CHAPTER X. "OWEN."

THERE instantly flashed across the boy trapper's brain a sentence recently spoken by Old Tomahawk concerning Owen:

"Before long, Trapper Tom, you'll be glad to trust him."

So great was the peril of the moment that the Wood Imp did not draw back from the person whom he had refused to admit into the cabin because he was the old Indian-fighter's friend.

On the contrary, he gave Owen his hand and was helped to a place above the floor of the niche just in time, he believed, to save him from the Indians in the gold cave.

"Keep still, boy," whispered Owen, in the darkness. "We no safe yet. The Sioux want our scalps, an' we must be cautious."

Trapper Tom's silence was a promise to obey, and together the pair heard the Sioux searching the cavern for the boy who had eluded them.

They found the panther, dead enough, and made a great ado over the body.

"It was a brave fight. Owen heard it all an' he knew that Trapper Tom would kill the beast."

"Well, that's more than I knew when I grappled with him," answered the Wood Imp.

"Why didn't you come to my rescue, Owen?"

"Because Owen knowed white boy would kill the panther."

Tom made no reply.

"Him no kill Young Eagle, though," continued Owen.

"Not in the cabin. If the panther hadn't interfered, we would have fought it out in the cave. But what are you, Owen, red or white?"

"Neither one," and the mysterious helper laughed. "Trapper Tom see by 'm by when light come."

"You are Old Tomahawk's friend?"

"Yes."

"Where is the old Indian-hater?"

"Injuns got 'm, mebbe."

"Mountain Pete and his red pards?"

"Mebbe so."

"They'll make short work ov him."

"Not so, white trapper. Tomahawk able to take care ov himself."

"I used to think I was, too; but since the events of to-night I begin to doubt my ability to do so."

To these words Owen made no reply, but seemed to be listening to the Indians who, without the means of making a light, were still searching the cave for Trapper Tom.

The precious furs, all save the bundle carried away by Young Eagle, had been removed to the upper corridor occupied by the boy and his helper, and were safe for the time being.

At last the search seemed to come to an end; the Indians were called from it by a signal, and went pell-mell from the cavern.

"Safe now!" said Owen, in gratified whis-

pers. "Injuns gone back to Mountain Pete. Now they think they fix Old Tomahawk, mebbe."

"Can we not save him?"

"Don't know, white trapper. Owen kin try, mebbe."

For several minutes the two persons listened to the receding sounds, and neither spoke until the last ones had died away.

"I would like to know how you got into this cave?" asked Trapper Tom. "You did not enter by the cabin?"

"I did not, white trapper. There is another trail which Owen's eyes discovered one day. Even Tomahawk does not know the new trail. You would not let Owen into the cabin to-night?"

"I did keep you out, didn't I? I will be honest with you. I heard you and old Tomahawk conversing on the roof and—"

"White boy suspected his old friend, eh?" interrupted Owen.

"That is it. I said I would be honest."

"Old Tomahawk true as steel, though," said Owen quickly. "Him no thought of betraying white beaver-hunter."

"I'm glad of that. It elevates Old Tomahawk in my opinion."

"Owen an' him are friends. They have hunted an' slept together; but until to-night they had not met for many moons. Now shall the white boy see Owen."

The speaker took Trapper Tom's hand as he finished and helped to lead him down the corridor in which they both were.

The furs at the friend's suggestion were left behind and no pause was made until many yards had been traversed.

"Has beaver hunter a match?" suddenly asked Owen.

Trapper Tom replied by producing a lucifer which he struck on the dark wall and then held up as it began to show a blaze.

For a moment the form and features of Owen were not revealed, but all at once he saw them and a light exclamation of surprise dropped from his lips.

Owen had told him that he was neither white nor red, and such was the fact.

He was yellow, a young half-breed!

A smile sat enthroned on Owen's countenance while Trapper Tom inspected him from head to foot with the assistance of the match.

"It is true! You are neither red nor white!" he exclaimed.

"Owen is part Injun, though," was the reply. "There flows through his veins the blood of his Crow mother."

"Your father was a white man."

"Yes."

"But you are prouder of your Indian blood?"

"The son should love his mother best," was the proud reply. "Owen is what you white people call a half-blood, boy trapper."

"That is no disgrace."

"Let a human being tell Owen that it is, an' he will fall dead at his feet! Yes, my mother was a Crow—a Crow princess, the daughter of Red Antelope."

"Your father?"

"Now let Owen's lips be sealed," was the

reply. "Did I not say that a son should love his mother best? White boy, you may see Owen meet his father one of these days. The Princess of the Crows sleeps where her son buried her after—"

The half-blood stopped suddenly as if he were on the threshold of a secret.

Trapper Tom looked into his face, but did not speak.

The features of Owen had suddenly darkened, his eyes were emitting lightning flashes, and he had clinched his hands until his palms were cut by the sharp nails.

"Owen is on a trail of vengeance!" he suddenly proceeded in a hoarse whisper as he leaned toward the boy trapper. "He has sworn by the grave of his Indian mother to hunt down the miserable dog who sent her to her narrow lodge under the woodland flowers! Be Owen's friend, an' you may see the son's revenge. He will not leave the trail until he stands at the end of it. He would willingly fight fifty panthers like the one you killed, trapper, to meet the dog he hunts! Red will be Owen's trail when it ends. I had no white name till I met Old Tomahawk. My Indian name was Se-ko-ta, or the Leaper, for I beat all the young Indians at the great match. Old Tomahawk called me Owen an' I like the name. It is my white one, you see, given to me by one I love."

Owen the half-blood was physically more robust than Trapper Tom, but the two were about the same age.

The yellow boy's hair was long, black and straight, like the hair of an Indian, and in more ways than one he showed the ancestry of which he boasted.

The boy trapper's match had gone out long before the conclusion of Owen's vengeful threats; but the half-breed's looks were still imprinted on his brain.

"We will think of Old Tomahawk now," suddenly cried Owen. "White trapper, you will rest here from your fight with the panther."

"No! I am going with you," said Trapper Tom with determination. "My wounds are slight and do not hurt me. I have wronged Old Tomahawk. I believed him treacherous. Now that I know him to be true, I am ready to shed my blood for him. You and I, Owen, will rescue him from the clutches of the reds if they have not already finished him. My furs are safe here for the present. To Old Tomahawk!"

"An' to vengeance!" hissed the half-breed.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD TOMAHAWK AGAIN.

MAY we not, gentle reader, go back a little way in our narrative and detail the adventures of Old Tomahawk since his separation from Trapper Tom in the gold cave?

It will be remembered that shortly after the escape from the cabin, the gaunt Indian-fighter went toward the mouth of the cavern for the purpose of seeing what the savages were doing, and that soon after his departure Trapper Tom

shot and killed the Sioux who entered the cave by the way Old Tomahawk had left it.

The old Sioux-hater crept down the narrow corridor with a great deal of caution, and finding the mouth of the shaft still covered by the burned door, he ventured into the cabin.

The smell of fire pervaded the entire place which was quite dark, and the old trailer believed the hut wholly untenanted.

He was not long, however, in discovering his mistake.

He was suddenly startled by the sound of a footstep, and before he could drop back into the shaft, he was pounced upon by four red-skins who disarmed and pinioned him before he could offer any resistance.

"Injun-hunter caught at last," ejaculated the red captors in tones of rejoicing. "Him hunt Sioux no more, mebbe."

"I don't doubt that, ef you greasers hev yer way," replied Old Tomahawk. "An' just now, jedgin' from appearances, ye'r' likely to hev it. Got me at last, you say? Must hev been lookin' fer Old Tomahawk."

"Injuns always on lookout fer him," was the quick response. "They no expect to find him in hut after door knocked in. Him come out ov ground, like snake."

The old trailer showed his teeth in a grin.

"Wal," he said straightening up and giving his captors a look of contempt and fearlessness. "Now that you've corralled me, what ar' ye goin' ter do about it?"

"Injuns show white man." And Old Tomahawk was dragged from the cabin without ceremony.

Just as the trailer expected, he was taken toward the stream whose banks were somewhat steep, and his captors halted with him near the water's edge.

"Yer white pard!" ejaculated the captive as a stalwart person clad in half-civilized dress and wearing a coonskin cap came in sight. "Mountain Pete, we heven't met fer some time."

For a moment there was no reply.

The individual called Mountain Pete halted before Old Tomahawk whom he surveyed with eyes that fairly blazed with a desperado's triumph.

Mountain Pete had brought with him to the spot almost a score of Sioux warriors whose countenances told that they were ready to lay violent hands on the captive.

"Caught at last!" suddenly growled the big renegade.

"Thet's just what the reds said when they caught me," was the reply. "Yer grammer must be catchin'. Permit me ter remark that I am caught at last which fact makes yer eyes twinkle."

Old Tomahawk was looking the renegade squarely in the face, a feat not difficult of accomplishment since five feet scarcely separated them.

"You're hated by the hull Sioux tribe," suddenly cried Mountain Pete.

"Thar's no mistake about that," answered Old Tomahawk.

"You've follered us like a skulkin' panther."

"Just as if I hedn't a right ter. The Sioux nation took ten years of my life from me. What don't I owe the red dogs fer that!"

"Whenever you could, you shot and sculped a Sioux."

"Bet yer moccasins I did!"

"Wal, I'm a Sioux."

As he uttered this declaration Mountain Pete rose on his toes to come down firmly on his heels.

"When a man hits a Sioux warrior he insults and strikes Mountai. Pete. I am to all intents an' purposes a Sioux warrior. These people ar' my brothers," and he described his companions with a sweep of his hand. "We have hunted, fought an' trapped together. When you tread on my toes you bruise the corns ov the hull Sioux Confederacy an' vice versa. I haven't been a white man for years. I am a Sioux Indian!"

"An' one thet averages blamed well with the hull lot!" ejaculated Old Tomahawk. "I've knowed fer years, Mountain Pete, thet ye war no white man, but hang me ef I thought thar war a chap on the face ov the airth mean enough ter acknowledge thet he war a Sioux."

These words, spoken in tones of contempt, cut to the quick.

"Yes, I'm a Sioux, an' when I became one I left mercy behind me."

"I b'lieve thet. When I saw you war goin' ter whip the boy trapper I might hev knowed thet ye war all Injun."

"Whar is the boy?" vociferated Mountain Pete. "I'm not through with the youngster yet."

"Find 'im, but don't fool with the youngster much," said Old Tomahawk.

"I'll whip 'im to death!"

"You would have done it before this ef I hed not interfered, eh?"

"Thet I would."

Old Tomahawk gave the ruffian a singular look.

"Do you know who thet boy is?" he asked.

"I don't want to know. You an' him ar' pards; thet's enough."

"I'm his friend an' I'll inform you right here, Mountain Pete, thet the chicken called Old Tomahawk intends to stand by thet boy through thick an' thin."

Mountain Pete broke out into a coarse, brutal laugh.

"We're goin' ter see thet you do not," he exclaimed and stepping suddenly back he snatched a pistol from his belt and leveled it at Old Tomahawk's head.

Confronted by this sudden danger the Sioux-hater did not quail.

"Thet's a coward's move," he said derisively. "Big as you ar', Mountain Pete, yer Injuns daren't let me use my hands."

There was murder in the bloodshot eyes of the white Sioux, and it is certain that he would have sent a pistol-bullet crashing through Old Tomahawk's brain if an agile young Sioux had not leaped between him and his victim.

"White man shall have fightin' show," said the red-skin as with one stroke he severed the cords that bound Old Tomahawk's wrists.

A mad curse fell from the desperado's tongue.

"I'll kill that Injun fer thet!" he hissed wheeling upon the liberator, but before he could cover the red-skin with his pistol Old Tomahawk bounded forward like an acrobat and landed with resistless force against his chest.

The unexpected charge threw Mountain Pete entirely off his feet, and the two men falling through the line of Indians landed together at the foot of the river-bank, and almost in the water.

The skeleton hand of the Indian-fighter was at the giant's throat, and the savages seeing the predicament their champion was in sprung forward to relieve him.

But ere they could reach his side the two men struck the water, beneath which they went together and locked in each other's embrace.

The somewhat startled Sioux stood nonplussed on the bank watching the spot where the water had closed over the forms of Old Tomahawk and Mountain Pete.

Suddenly one more solicitous than the rest for the renegade's safety plunged in and disappeared.

As he did so a head was lifted above the surface of the water, some distance down-stream, and in the shadow of a tree-top.

"I reckon thet little chokin' 'll not be fergotten till the middle ov next week," ejaculated the owner of the head, who was none other than Old Tomahawk. "I hed ye in my power, Mountain Pete, an' could hev sent you to the happy huntin'-ground ov the tribe whose religion you've embraced, but I happened to think ov Owen an' a few other things, an' let you off with just half what you desarve. Thar! they've found ye, hev they? Now they'll wrestle with you an' fetch you to arter ther Injun fashion. They'll fix ye up fer future devilment, Mountain Pete, but just keep out of Old Tomahawk's way, will yer?"

The old Indian-hater swam under the water to the tree-top that sheltered him, and from his position he could see the Indians draw the unconscious body of Mountain Pete from the water and gather round it with a good deal of anxiety.

"Bring 'im to, fer somebody to kill; that's right!" said Old Tomahawk, as he watched the proceedings for a few moments. "It isn't on the boards fer Mountain Pete to die by an overdose of water. One ov the foulest crimes ever committed in this western kentry has ter be avenged, an' ther avenger is on yer trail, Pete."

Five minutes later the old Indian-trailer left his tree-top, and, swimming quietly down-stream, reached a shady spot, where he left the water and speedily disappeared.

"I'll go back to the cave an' jine Trapper Tom," he said. "If I kin find Owen we'll make a three-hoss team thet'll astonish the reds."

He reached the cabin by a roundabout route, and, after a careful inspection, entered at the burned-away door.

It was dark and silent.

Groping his way to the little shaft leading to the gold cave, Old Tomahawk lowered his body into it.

He quickly made his way to the cave proper,

where he stumbled over the mangled body of the panther killed by the Wood Imp in the desperate encounter we have described.

"Jehosaphat! a carved painter!" he exclaimed, after a moment's inspection with his hands. "If that boy did this he'll do ter fight red-skins."

Then he called for Trapper Tom in cautious tones, but the only reply was the echo of his own words.

The gold cave had been deserted by the boy trapper, and, after a short examination of the place, Old Tomahawk turned away.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISPUTED DEER.

"YOUR eyes must have deceived you, Owen. I see nothing."

"Owen see nothing now, either," said the yellow-skinned boy who stood at Trapper Tom's side in the forest the sunset following the scenes narrated in the previous chapter.

"But you saw something, eh?"

"Yes," replied the half-breed with confidence. "Owen saw something creep along the edge of the sky where it meets the land. White boy's eyes ar' good yet he saw it not."

"I must confess, Owen—"

"Look! there it goes again—one! two! three!"

The half-breed now held Trapper Tom's arm in a convulsive grasp while, with the other hand, he pointed toward the distant horizon below which the sun had just gone down.

"I thought I saw something, but I am not sure," said the boy trapper. "I willingly acknowledge that you have the best eyes, Owen. Were the figures you saw and counted those of men?"

"Owen not certain, but him think so," was the reply.

"Maybe more will cross the spot. Watch."

For several minutes longer the two boys stood where they had halted in the forest, but nothing occurred to startle the young Indian again.

"May I go see?" he suddenly asked, looking up into Trapper Tom's face.

"Yes, but I will go with you."

"Owen go alone," and the half-breed's hand tightened once more on the Wood Imp's arm. "White trapper stay here and keep his eyes open. Owen come back by an' by."

The following moment the beaver catcher stood alone in the forest, and Owen was fast disappearing.

We need but say here that since their adventures in the gold cave, the two companions had searched the vicinity of the mine for Old Tomahawk.

They had discovered plenty of fresh Indian "sign" which told them that Mountain Pete and his red-skins still hovered in the neighborhood, and admonished them to be exceedingly cautious.

They had failed to bring to light anything positive concerning Old Tomahawk's fate, but were not prepared to believe that the old fellow had been put to death by his captors.

Doubting at times, Trapper Tom often more

than half-believed that the presence of the Sioux had frightened Old Tomahawk away, but Owen always came to the old hunter's rescue, and defended him against the boy trapper's imputations.

We will now go back to the boys in the forest.

After Owen's departure Trapper Tom moved back a few paces and stationed himself against a tree.

Owen, the half-breed, had already vanished, and the last remains of day were leaving the wood.

All at once Trapper Tom heard a bounding noise, and turning quickly he beheld a splendid buck standing about twenty-five yards from his position, with head erect and looking as majestic as one of his species ever looked.

"Heavens! what a target!" fell involuntarily from Trapper Tom's lips, and his rifle almost cocked itself, as it were. "Never before during my life in the woods have I had such a chance to kill a buck. Where is Owen? Out of sight, of course. I cannot let this opportunity slip."

The boy's rifle struck his shoulder as he finished the last sentence, and his ruddy cheek dropped to the polished stock.

The deer never moved, but stood still as if expecting the deadly shot.

Suddenly the stillness of the forest was broken by the sharp report of the boy's rifle, and the noble animal sprung into the air to fall back to earth, quivering in the agonies of death.

Trapper Tom stood in his tracks a moment after the shot, then, whipping out his knife, he bounded toward the deer with a hunter's enthusiasm.

The animal had fallen at the edge of a dense little thicket of young trees, from which it had emerged a few moments before the fatal shot.

The boy trapper reached the spot in a few bounds, and immediately drove his knife into the buck's throat.

"Well done, boy; but that deer b'longs ter me!"

At these words Trapper Tom leaped to his feet, and then recoiled a pace at sight of the man by whom he was confronted.

"Mountain Pete!" ejaculated the Wood Imp, recognizing in the stalwart figure, dark face and broad shoulders of the individual before him his merciless old enemy.

"That's who I am!" was the gruff rejoinder. "When I say that deer's mine, I mean it. Just examine t'other side the carcass an' you'll find a bullet-hole in the heart."

"But I shot him!" persisted Tom.

"An' didn't I?"

Mountain Pete supplemented his interrogative with a coarse laugh, that sent the hot blood tingling to Trapper Tom's finger-tips.

The giant was standing with one foot on the carcass of the buck, and he looked down with disdain and contempt upon the boy so much his inferior in stature.

Still the little trapper did not quail.

If there was a bullet in the buck's heart, then he and Mountain Pete had fired together, and the deer had fallen stricken by two balls.

Such affairs had happened before; why not now?

"Ain't you goin' ter give up?" suddenly asked the white Sioux. "This ar' my buck, an' I propose ter hev it!"

"You see my bullet-hole," said Trapper Tom, pointing to the bloody wound in the stag's breast.

"An' I'll show you mine."

Suiting action to his words, Mountain Pete suddenly stooped and overturned the carcass with an ease that astonished the boy trapper.

"What d' yer call that?" he cried pointing in triumph to a bullet-wound in the carcass just behind the fore-shoulder.

Trapper Tom stepped forward and inspected the place.

"Give it up now, eh?" continued the forest Hercules. "Now, my young clipper, make yerself scarce. You know me. I'm the sinner who war goin' ter trim yer down when Old Tomahawk came up an' interrupted the proceedin's. The next time I'll whip you raw!"

Trapper Tom's eyes flashed at this threat, and his cheeks crimsoned.

"Don't redder and shoot me with yer eyes!" resumed Mountain Pete. "I mean just what I say, an' no man ever caught this daisy in a lie. Yes, when I want you I'll tie you up an' wear out on you the toughest sticks in the woods. The next time Old Tomahawk will not interfere."

"Try it, Mountain Pete!" cried the boy beaver-hunter. "I am here now and I call you the meanest thing that ever walked ground—a white Indian! You boast that you have turned Sioux, I hear. When you went to their lodges you only sought your level. A meaner thing than a renegade never crawled the earth!"

With an oath Mountain Pete strode forward, and his right foot landed on the carcass of the disputed buck.

"I'll whip you now, weasel!" he madly hissed. "I'll give you a blood-red jacket by which to remember Mountain Pete, the white Sioux."

Already the daring beaver-catcher had raised his rifle, and was standing his ground like a Spartan.

"You whip me, dog of a Sioux? I guess not!"

"I'll do it or die!"

The next second the huge form of Mountain Pete descended like an avalanche upon the Wood Imp, but at the same time down came the clubbed rifle!

Trapper Tom struck with all his might.

The blow staggered the renegade who tried to break its force by throwing up his arms, but, despite their protection, he went backward with a half-smothered curse.

Trapper Tom saw the effect of his blow and followed up his success.

He leaped upon the carcass of the deer and followed his first stroke with another that seemed to complete the battle, for the forest outlaw fell backward insensible.

Without leaving his somewhat elevated station, Trapper Tom surveyed his work for a few moments.

"What will Owen say if I have killed the wretch?" he asked himself in audible tones. "His infamous words made me strike with all

my might. I guess he will not whip me as he expected."

The beaver-hunter stooped over the senseless giant, and soon satisfied himself that his blows had not deprived him of life, then taking Mountain Pete's knife from his belt and thrusting it into his own, he sprung over the carcass and hurried away.

Some distance away he encountered Owen.

"White boy shoot?" were the half-breed's first words.

"Yes. Come and see what I have done."

The two boys went back to the tragic spot.

The deer was there, but Mountain Pete was gone!

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOOD FULL OF RED-SKINS.

STANDING by the carcass of the buck, Trapper Tom related his adventures to the half-breed boy.

"White trapper no kill Mountain Pete an' Owen is glad," exclaimed the listener at the conclusion of the narrative.

"For your sake I am glad, too. You hate the villain so, Owen."

The half-breed's eyes seemed to flash.

An examination of the spot where the forest Hercules had fallen before Trapper Tom's clubbed rifle showed that no blood had been spilled, and the twain concluded that Mountain Pete had managed to get away not much hurt.

"We find him by'm by," said Owen, somewhat disappointed. "Him no get away every time."

"I trust he will not. I am more than convinced that Mountain Pete is one of the meanest men the great Northwest ever produced."

The half-breed boy now told the young beaver-catcher that his reconnaissance had revealed the fact that the moving figures he had seen were those of Indians, undoubtedly Sioux, and Mountain Pete's red companions.

"We must find out what has become of Old Tomahawk," said the boy trapper. "If the fiends have made 'way with him, they shall suffer for it. If he is still alive and in their power, he shall be rescued. I am for fighting the redskins to the last gasp."

The last word had scarcely left the boy's lips ere the report of a rifle awoke the echoes of the forest, and a bullet whistled between the heads of the two boys.

Instantly they whirled toward the direction from which the unexpected shot had come, and stood ready with rifles cocked for a sight of the foe.

The shades of night had again fallen throughout the wood, and objects could not be distinguished at very great distance.

Both Trapper Tom and Owen believed that they owed their safety to the gathering darkness as it had undoubtedly spoiled the would-be slayer's aim.

"It was an Indian!" said the half-breed.

"Or Mountain Pete," suggested Trapper Tom.

"No; red-skin," persisted Owen.

Just then the young beaver-catcher thought he saw a figure glide from tree to tree in his front, and quickly his rifle sought his shoulder,

But at a sign from Owen he withheld his fire and it was well enough that he did for the gliding figure had already disappeared.

The reader can imagine the suspense with which the two boys awaited the next movement of their foes.

That they were seen by Indians was now certain, and their only fear was that the red-skins would surround them.

There was great danger of this catastrophe, as the wood was quite dark, and they would have to depend on their ears alone.

The companions had taken up their station behind two trees that stood close together where, with rifles prepared for any emergency, they were ready for the conflict.

All at once a rifle sung out clearly behind them, and a bullet buried itself in the bark of Trapper Tom's tree within two inches of his head.

"We are surrounded!" he exclaimed. "As sure as fate, Owen, the red devils have encircled us."

This was just what the two boys did not desire, and the only turn of affairs they really feared.

They could imagine the living circle contracting in the gloom, and the red-skins crawling upon them like panthers, scarcely disturbing a leaf as they advanced.

What was to be done?

The shot from behind had told the youths that the enemy was in their rear.

Should they attempt to creep the lines?

This was an undertaking from which the bravest might shrink; but it really seemed their only chance.

After the shot from behind, Trapper Tom and Owen crouched at the foot of their trees, and then lay flat on the ground.

While in this posture they put their heads together in a council of war in whispers.

"We must not stay here," said the Wood Imp. "This spot will be too hot to hold us five minutes from now."

"We must creep like snakes through this circle," said Owen in reply.

"If it is our only chance, I'm in for it."

Thus briefly the council ended, but the boys did not get upon their feet.

The stillness that now filled the forest seemed the portentous silence that often precedes a storm.

If the boys had listened they might have heard the beating of their own hearts.

"Ready, now—come!" fell in whispers on Trapper Tom's ears, and he felt the silken fingers of Owen, the half-breed, at his wrist.

Now began the perilous crawl, the object of which was to get beyond the Indian lines and effect their escape back to the gold cave, which they knew could be readily defended against a large party of red-skins.

The young friends kept close together, almost head to heel, for Owen led the way, with Trapper Tom following close after.

Life in the wood soon renders one cautious and wary.

In a short time the hunter learns the habits of the animals he has to contend with, and readily imitates them; his footstep becomes as noiseless as the tread of the panther, and he

creeps through the forest without snapping a twig, though the ground be covered with them.

Thus it was with Owen and Trapper Tom.

Both knew the ways of woodcraft, for among the trees in the wild lands of Indian and bear they had passed their best days.

Trapper Tom had never attempted to creep Indian lines before, but he had stolen upon the wariest game, and this experience stood him well now.

Like cheetahs stealing through the forest with bellies near the ground, the two boys moved along, scarcely disturbing a leaf or moving a twig.

"The reds possess sharp ears if they hear us," thought Trapper Tom, ere they had proceeded a hundred yards. "I am sure that an owl's eye could not single us out. A few more yards—"

The owl that flew from her perch with a frightened cry at this juncture broke the strain of the boy's self-congratulations.

An owl had seen them, and his hoot might be understood by the redskins.

Owen ground his teeth at the flight of the bird, but said nothing, keeping on, with Trapper Tom's coon-skin cap at his heels.

Suddenly the half-breed paused, and the next moment Trapper Tom was at his side with silence for his question.

"Somethin' comin' this way," said Owen in the lowest of whispers.

"My God! no!" ejaculated Trapper Tom.

"Comin' sure," was the reiteration. "Let white trapper listen while he holds his breath."

The reader may be sure that Trapper Tom did listen, and after a moment's silence he clutched Owen's wrist.

"You are right. Something, whether man or beast I do not know, is coming straight toward us. It is not thirty yards away at this minute."

"We part, then. White boy, go to tree on your right; Owen will take left one. We let Injun or panther through."

The boys lost no time in separating, and presently a path was cleared for the mysterious crawler.

On he came, stopping at intervals, as it seemed, to listen a moment.

Owen had changed his rifle to his left hand and clutched a knife in his right.

Trapper Tom had followed his example, and thus the boy friends waited for the enemy.

Nearer and nearer came the crawler, undoubtedly a human being, and of course of the red band by whom they were surrounded.

How the boys strained their eyes as the slight noise made by the night crawler announced his approach!

At last they caught a glimpse of a man's figure; it was darker than the ground and thus showed its outlines.

Owen dropped his rifle without noise and raised his hunting-knife.

"Injun go by safe if be will," he muttered. "If him find us out, Injun dies!"

Trapper Tom had formed the same resolution, for he, too, had dropped his rifle and held his knife ready for a spring upon the creeper,

Another minute of suspense was passing away when the crawler reached a spot exactly between the two boys.

The crisis had come.

To the horror of the two watchers, the crawler halted there and looked around as if he suspected their presence.

"I'll git up an' stretch my limbs a minute," they suddenly heard the crawler say, above a whisper, and in the coarse voice of the old frontiersman, and the next minute the gaunt figure left the ground and straightened before them.

Almost at the same moment the two boys sprung erect.

"Old Tomahawk! thank Heaven!" burst from Trapper Tom's throat, as his hands and Owen's, too, fell on the man's arms and hel'd him to the spot.

Old Tomahawk the crawler was, and not a red-skin, as they had suspected.

"What ar' ye doin' here?" asked the old fellow. "I thought you war further towards the middle of the circle."

"We were a while ago; but we are trying to creep out."

"How? I guess it's easier creepin' in than out."

"Then we are really surrounded?"

"Wal, I should remark. I had to choke one Sioux buck to death afore I could git inside. We'll hev to choke a dozen, mebbe, afore we git out."

"Are they so numerous?"

Old Tomahawk was silent for a moment.

"Boy," he suddenly said, "it looks to me like we war surrounded by Sittin' Bull's hull tribe. The woods ar' full ov'em. If that's one, that's five hundred!"

This was doleful news.

CHAPTER XIV.

THRILLING ADVENTURES.

As the reader will suspect, there was another whispered consultation over the news brought by Old Tomahawk.

This time three persons instead of two took part in the council, and it was decided to continue the advance.

Old Tomahawk said that he feared that his presence had been suspected by the wily redskins which, if he was correct, would render the advance more perilous than before.

Dropping to the earth again, the trio crept forward, led this time by the gaunt Indian-fighter.

Owen the half-breed crept at his heels, and Trapper Tom brought up the rear.

For some distance nothing occurred to disturb the movement, and the boy trapper began to congratulate himself on their success.

"We must have advanced beyond their lines," he said to himself. "Why does not Old Tomahawk get up and announce that we are safe?"

The wily old scalper knew that the danger line had not been passed, and that was why he had not risen to his feet and tickled Trapper Tom's ears with the announcement he wanted to hear.

Suddenly there rung through the forest a yell

so fierce and piercing that the three crawlers instantly came to a halt.

All knew that it came from the throat of an Indian brave, and as Trapper Tom turned his face in the direction from which the sound came he thought he saw the Indian crouching at the foot of a tree.

"Look yonder!" he whispered at Old Tomahawk's ear as he grasped the scalper's arm.

"What is it, boy?"

"The Indian who just hallooed."

"I don't see 'im. Whar is the red greaser?"

"Crouched at the foot of yon tree," and Trapper Tom designated the tree with outstretched hand.

The old woodsman strained his eyes for a moment and then shook his head.

"No Injun thar, boy."

"But I see him," persisted Tom.

"Thet's a knot at the foot ov the tree; I see it now."

"Then it's a living knot."

"I'll go an' see."

Before either of the boys could detain Old Tomahawk he had crept away, and they saw him approaching the tree a few yards away and just discernible.

"If they fight we are gone," whispered Trapper Tom. "The noise of the combat will give our position away, and we will be surrounded in less than two minutes."

The figure of the old scalper moving like a snake over the surface of the ground soon passed out of sight, but Trapper Tom kept his eyes on the object at the foot of the tree.

All at once he saw the "knot" leap from the ground, and a human figure sprung noiselessly upon it.

No sounds followed the meeting of red and white, and several minutes afterward Old Tomahawk appeared to the boys again.

"That knot war alive, sure enough, Trapper Tom," he said, with a smile as he held up a reeking scalp to Tom's gaze. "Just what made the Injun give that yell will never be known, I guess. Sart'in it is that he saw us crawlin' through their lines."

Trapper Tom wanted to ask the old scalper whether they were not almost through the Indian lines, but he was not given the chance, as Old Tomahawk put himself at the head of the little line again and resumed the advance.

His orders enjoining strict silence told the Wood Imp that they were still on dangerous ground.

For thirty minutes more the crawl was continued and then Old Tomahawk stood erect.

"At last!" ejaculated Trapper Tom, springing up. "We have emerged from the jaws of death."

The response was a loud shout from Indian lips, and the whiz of a dozen arrows.

Owen whirled half-way round with a cry of pain and Tom's cap was carried from his head.

"We're not out yet," said Old Tomahawk. "Bless me! ef we hevn't halted in a reg'lar Injun nest."

The whole wood now resounded with warcries of the most ferocious nature.

They were terrible enough to strike doom to the hearts of the listeners.

"We've got to run for it, boys," said Old Tomahawk.

"Straight ahead?" asked Tom.

"Tbet's the course. Ar' you hurt bad, Owen?"

"Only an arrow through my arm. I will pay the reds for this!" was the grated answer.

Meanwhile, Trapper Tom was looking on the ground for his cap, an article which he prized very highly.

"Let yer cap go," said the old trapper. "Yer scalp's worth a thousand coonskin caps."

At this moment Trapper Tom found his cap which was transfixated by a Sioux arrow, showing how narrowly he had escaped death.

"Now for the run!" cried Old Tomahawk. "Keep behind me. If I am fit y-two, I guess I kin lead the party."

Away bounded the Indian-hater with Owen and Trapper Tom at his heels.

The break for liberty was observed by the red-skins who seemed to possess the eyes of nighthawks.

The whole forest again resounded with yells and another flight of arrows accompanied by a few rifle-balls, followed the dash.

Then the maddened Sioux sprung after the intrepid three who ran with all their might, feeling the importance of the race.

They leaped over logs shown by the dim light of the moon and dashed through little thickets with the nerve of hunted deer, all the time hearing behind them the wild yells of their pursuers.

"My God! Injuns ahead!" fell suddenly in accents the most startling from Old Tomahawk's lips.

He had scarcely spoken ere a dozen rifles flashed in their very faces and the bullets seemed to shriek as they whistled past the trappers' heads.

"Down!" commanded Old Tomahawk, and the harassed three dropped immediately to the ground.

Fortunately they had reached a spot where two fallen trees lay close together and formed a sort of natural fort.

Dropping into the inclosure the trio got ready to repel an assault, and then awaited events.

Like magic the forest suddenly grew still, so still that no one would have suspected that it contained a foe as wily and bloodthirsty as an Indian brave.

"Where are we?" whispered Trapper Tom, at Old Tomahawk's elbow.

"Between two trees."

"I know that; but—"

"Wal, we're in a pretty bad predicament; that's about the amount ov it."

Tom bit his lips; the old scalper's answers were so unsatisfactory.

"White boy pull arrow out of Owen's arm," said the half breed at this juncture. "Head broke off—see? Owen shut his teeth while white trapper pull."

Tom's fingers were at the Indian shaft that had pierced the boy's arm and he began to pull.

Owen's eyes flashed as the arrow was withdrawn, and he ground his teeth until it had been pulled through the wound.

"Arrow out now," he said. "Arm already

feels better. Owen will never forget white boy's help."

"Just as if I didn't owe you this favor," said Tom, remembering the half-breed's valuable services rendered in the gold cave. "Were I to help you a thousand times I would not have canceled the debt I owe you."

By this time Old Tomahawk had inspected the forest fort which promised to conceal them from the bullets and arrows of the red-skins, especially as long as the night held out.

Daylight would bring new peril to the besieged, but the Sioux-hater hoped to be far beyond the temporary fort long before dawn.

The trees had fallen in a manner that provided each end of the fort with a thick bushy top almost impenetrable, while the logs themselves formed a breastwork that promised valuable assistance in case of attack.

"There's something in yon top," said Trapper Tom to Owen, who was nursing the new hate that had followed the withdrawal of the arrow.

"Guess not, white boy."

"You may not have heard it, for you were not listening," was Tom's reply. "I am sure that my ears have not deceived me. I'm going to see what it is."

Armed only with his hunting-knife, which he carried unsheathed in his right hand, Trapper Tom crept on all-fours toward the tree-top where he was certain he had heard a suspicious noise.

As he was not compelled to pass Old Tomahawk on his way, he was not stopped by that worthy's skeleton hand, and he soon reached the bushy boughs where he halted and listened.

Could it be that his ears had deceived him, and that he had imagined what he had not really heard?

For several moments he listened without hearing a sound, and he was about to go back to Owen and confess that for once he had been deceived, when a slight rustling among the leaves made him draw back.

"I was not mistaken," he said to himself. "The Indians have already entered our fort."

The rustling which had startled him continued instead of dying away and all at once an object, huge, black and ferocious, sprung from the tree top and landed almost upon the crouching boy!

The outburst was sudden enough to draw a cry of horror from Trapper Tom's lips.

He sprung up in time to escape a blow from a gigantic arm, but not too late to be charged by the new enemy.

"My God! a grizzly!" exclaimed the Wood Imp in tones that must have reached the enemy sneaking through the forest. "Better a dozen red skins than a foe like this."

Old Tomahawk and Owen went forward to Trapper Tom's assistance for they knew the nature of the onslaught even before the astonished beaver-catcher had named the new foe.

"A b'ar it is!" cried the gaunt trailer. "Stand off, Trapper Tom, an' let me at Old Eph."

But Trapper Tom, even if he wished to obey Old Tomahawk, found himself in a position that forced him to stand and fight.

The grizzly had advanced upon him, standing

erect upon his hinder feet, and resembling a mountain of ferocity.

Trapper Tom saw his little eyes shining in the moonlight that struggled down through the trees, and then the monster reached him!

The terrible paws seemed to take him into their deadly embrace, and the distended jaws of the monster appeared a veritable cave of death.

The menaced boy had scarcely a second left for reflection.

Retreat he could not, for the grizzly was actually upon him, therefore, shutting his teeth hard he raised his knife and aimed a blow at the bear's breast.

We need not say that Trapper Tom put all the strength he could command into that stroke.

The knife hit the very spot aimed at, and the keen blade disappeared beneath the thick hide of the grizzly.

An instant later the boy found himself in the embrace of the bear, and that before he could withdraw his knife.

Old Tomahawk and Owen came up at this moment.

"Help! help!" pealed from the boy trapper's throat.

The Indian-fighter uttered a mad cry as he shot straight at the grizzly.

"Assail 'im on t'other side, Owen," he said to the half-breed, who sprung to obey the command almost before it was uttered.

Thus attacked by two knives at once, the grizzly found himself in an unpleasant predicament, and when Old Tomahawk had driven his long-bladed hunting-knife home, directly behind the fore-shoulder, he released Trapper Tom and staggered back.

Old Tomahawk followed him up with a mad exclamation of vengeance.

Just then a loud voice came from the forest on the right.

"Will the white-faces surrender? The Sioux have them in a pen."

"Wait till I've settled this b'ar!" answered Old Tomahawk.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIGHT FOR THE FORT.

TRAPPER TOM had fallen from the bear's embrace apparently more dead than alive.

He was insensible, and did not hear the demand from the shadows of the wood nor Old Tomahawk's answer.

Owen picked him up and carried him toward the spot where he had left his rifle, while the Indian-fighter followed the grizzly, which had fallen with a crash into the tree-top.

The old fellow seemed to forget the proximity of the Indians in his eagerness to finish the monster which had almost put a period to his young friend's existence.

With a courage that bordered on foolhardiness he leaped into the foliage and grappled with the dying grizzly.

Thick and fast rained the blows, guided by the old backwoodsman's keen eye; and when he came forth, with claw-torn coat and bleeding face, there was the flash of victory in his eyes.

"Another grizzly less!" he ejaculated. "I never leave one job, afore I'm through with it, to 'tend to another. I wouldn't exchange the pleasure ov a grizzly tussle fer a gold-mine. Now fer the Injuns."

He left the spot and walked toward Owen and the beaver-catcher, who were found in the middle of the fort.

Trapper Tom had nearly recovered from the hug of the grizzly, and greeted Old Tomahawk with a faint smile as the latter came up.

"Thar's no sweetheart t'et kin hug like a grizzly," observed the old Indian-hater. "I calkerlate that he'll show his affection to no more people this side of grizzly paradise."

"He's dead, then?"

"Dead? I can't just now remember when I left a grizzly in any other condition. Dead? Dead as last summer's flowers! Of course you heard what the Injuns said a few moments ago?"

"Yes; they want us to surrender."

"The fools! I told 'em ter wait till I had settled Old Eph. Hevin' done that little job, I'm now ready fer ther reds."

Since Old Tomahawk's reply to the demand for surrender the surrounding forest had been unusually still.

"They're waitin' with more patience 'n I ever knowed a red-skin ter possess," remarked the old fellow to his boy companions. "I'm goin' ter play fair with the greasers. Here goes."

Raising his head slightly above the log breastwork Old Tomahawk shouted:

"Reds, the b'ar is dead. If I didn't misunderstand you awhile ago, you asked us ter surrender."

The reply was not delayed.

"The Sioux spoke to the pale-faces through their leader. They have the white hunters in a pen, and the braves of the Sioux nation surround them. If they shut their ears against the words of the braves, they will not see the sun go to sleep any more."

"All ov which means that we'll be tetotally wiped out ef we don't give in right away," said Old Tomahawk. "Do you hear that, boys? The Injuns say they've got us in a pen without the ghost ov a chance fer safety. What shall I say?"

Owen whose eyes showed the defiance that rankled in his breast was about to reply when Trapper Tom spoke:

"Tell the red varmints no!" cried the little beaver-catcher. "No compromise with a lot of rascally Sioux. Surrender means death—languishing, torturing death—sooner than a brave defense. We have a good fort here. I say fight it out!"

Old Tomahawk's eyes glowed with pride and satisfaction while the boy spoke.

"Fight it is," he said as he turned away.

"War to the knife!" cried Owen the half-breed. "Trapper Tom took Owen's words from his tongue, and spoke them like a brave."

Certain sounds told that the savages were becoming impatient.

"We've decided not ter surrender," suddenly called out Old Tomahawk and then ducked his head, admonishing Trapper Tom and Owen to lie close to the ground.

The boys quickly threw themselves on the earth, and in the nick of time, too, for the next second a thundering volley of rifles seemed to shake the whole wood, and a perfect hail-storm of bullets buried itself in the logs, or passed harmlessly over the heads of the prostrate trio.

"May be they'll charge us," suggested Trapper Tom.

"That's not the Sioux's tactics when they're on foot," was the quick reply. "Let 'em straddle their hosses; then look out. My opinion is that they 'll try some sneakin' trick afore mornin'."

The night was now nearly half gone, and Old Tomahawk and his companions were still confined to the natural fort.

"I'd just like to know how many Injuns ar' out thar, an' whether they've got us completely surrounded as they say they have," said the old scalper suddenly. "I b'lieve I'll reconnoiter."

"I object to that," said Trapper Tom quickly. "You can't be spared from the fort just at this time. We all stay here."

"By hokey! you talk like you're the captain ov this squad!" returned Old Tomahawk with a grin. "What do you say, Owen?"

There was no reply.

"Whar's Owen?" asked the Indian-fighter surprised.

"Yonder."

"I guess not. Trapper Tom, that yaller boy is not in the fort."

This announcement sent a thrill of surprise through the beaver-catcher's frame.

The fort was immediately searched for Owen the half-breed; but he was not to be found.

"Hang me if he hasn't gone to reconnoiter!" exclaimed the backwoodsman. "If I had crawled out, Tom, you'd have been the only defender of the fort. What took that young fox off in that sudden manner? Mebbe he wants to diskiver whether Mountain Pete's among the reds out thar."

There was no use in looking for Owen who had certainly left the fort at this critical juncture, and hoping that he would turn up all right before day, Old Tomahawk and Trapper Tom resolved to watch with both eyes open till that event should take place.

An hour of strange silence, strange for that time and place, followed Owen's departure.

The deafening volley which had torn through the limbs had not been followed by another, and Old Tomahawk had a right to conclude from the stillness that the Sioux would attempt some stratagem.

The openings or glades of the forest were faintly discernible in the moonlight, and though the occupants of the log fort watched them intently they could not see the first sign of a foe.

Lower and lower sunk the moon as the night wore away, and the entire forest gradually became one shade of darkness.

"Look out now," admonished Old Tomahawk. "Them o'ner red-skins out yonder love to do their work in the darkness. Mebbe all at once they'll pour over these logs like an army ov rats. My command is: 'Keep your eyes peeled!'"

Trapper Tom, fully alive to the importance of the hour, assured his companion that his watchfulness should not for one moment be abated, and with finger on the trigger he waited on.

Almost continually he thought of Owen between him and whom a strong attachment had sprung up, and he longed to see the daring young half-breed once more at his side.

Would the morning bring Owen, or would it find them one and all lying dead and scalped in the forest fort?

Suddenly Trapper Tom felt a hand on his arm, and turning half-way round he beheld the bronzed face of Old Tomahawk.

There was startling information in the old Indian-fighter's eyes.

"You ain't asleep, Tom?" he asked.

"No."

"Don't make any noise, but look straight over the log. It's gittin' daylight, but for all that, the Injuns hev come."

Without reply, Trapper Tom looked over the tree and saw that the wood was getting lighter, but slowly; the change was just perceptible.

"My stars! they are here, sure enough!" cried the boy trapper. "Those objects I see scattered over the ground are not limbs, but Indians."

"An' each one expects to hev the honor ov scalpin' us!" said Old Tomahawk, coolly. "But I see one buck what shall never touch a ha'r ov my head."

Trapper Tom saw the Indian-fighter's rifle glide over the top of the log, while his head and shoulders were screened from the red-skin's view by dead leaves.

"What! are you going to begin the battle?" he asked.

"Nothin' more nor less. I'm goin' ter begin the dance ov death."

"They'll charge us if you fire."

"Let 'em charge."

Trapper Tom saw Old Tomahawk's cheek drop to the stock of his rifle, but the following moment a shot, beyond the Indian line and in the depths of the forest, rung clearly out.

He saw the figure of a prostrate red-skin leap into the air, with a cry that made the backwoods ring, and then fall dead among his companions.

"Jehosaphat! who did that?" exclaimed Old Tomahawk, as the crawling Sioux sprung up with terrible yells.

"Here they come! Give them the best you've got, Tomahawk!"

These words from Trapper Tom's lips were not needed to make the bear-killer fight.

The Indian army was rushing upon the fort, brandishing their tomahawks and scalping-knives.

"Give the demons their dues!" called out Old Tomahawk.

The next second the repeating-rifles of the two companions were laid across the logs, and the charging Sioux were met by a fire that sent many to the ground.

In addition to the fire from the fort, some person behind the Indians was emptying the magazine of a Winchester with deadly effect into their red ranks.

Trapper Tom suddenly caught sight of the help outside, and uttered a shout.

It was Owen, the half-breed!

The Sioux seemed dazed by the terrific fire that thinned their ranks.

If they had attacked the fort from both sides, their success would have been certain and speedy, but they chose to assault it from a single point, hence their destruction.

With sixteen shots apiece Old Tomahawk and Trapper Tom met them, with a determination to conquer or die behind the logs.

They worked the repeating rifles with deadly effect.

Some of the red-skins came within twenty yards of the fortification, but never got nearer.

The avenging rifl's singled them out and dropped them in their tracks.

All at once the red-skins turned and presented their backs to the defenders of the fort, and Owen fired two shots straight into their faces.

"Whipped!" cried Trapper Tom. "Hurrah! hurrah!"

Yes, the battle was over.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE YELLOW BOY'S VENGEANCE.

"THET's what I call a close shot," said Old Tomahawk, as the discomfitted Sioux drew off, leaving him and Trapper Tom in undisturbed possession of the forest fort. "Ef they hev retreated, they're likely to trouble us more. Mountain Pete hasn't got enough yet ef he is among the reds. He'll put 'em up to more deviltry afore night ef Owen doesn't get th' drop on his mug."

Turning from the fort, the Sioux turned their attention to the half-breed who had gotten in the rear, and from a slightly elevated position poured some deadly shots into their ranks.

The boy heard their mad yells as they sprung toward him, but he did not desert his position until he had dropped two more with his unerring rifle.

"Now for it, Owen," he said to himself, as he tightened his belt and darted away with the agility of the practiced runner, while at least fifty red-skins pursued.

Old Tomahawk and the Wood Imp saw the hot chase, and watched pursuers and pursued disappear over a wooded knoll.

"They'll run him down!" exclaimed Trapper Tom, excitedly.

"I'd like to see 'em do it. I know that boy," was the Indian-fighter's prompt response. "They'll all come back arter awhile crestfallen an' pretty well blown. Catch Owen? No red-skin on top ov ground kin do that."

These words reassured Tom and rendered him easy as to the peril that menaced the half-breed.

He therefore turned his attention to the little battle-ground over which the Sioux had attempted to reach the fort.

The Indians on their retreat had carried away several dead and wounded, but a dozen of the former still incumbered the ground, their painted faces upturned toward the boughs, and their eyes staring at the patches of cold, clear sky far beyond.

It was a sight to which the boy trapper was not accustomed, and seeing that Old Tomahawk was watching him cautiously, he turned to him with a smile.

"More dead Injuns out than you ever saw at once, eh?" said the Indian-hater. "They're all good reds now. When I get half a chance, I'll add to my stock ov scalps fer I know the ones I brought down; I've marked 'em all."

"How many scalps have you now?"

"Haven't counted 'em for three months, an' durin' that time I reckon I've got in some work."

"When will you rest?"

"When some red drops me, I expect. You see, Trapper Tom, them red devils robbed me ov ten years ov life, an' I'm tryin' ter pay 'em what I owe 'em. Ov course I've found the lost gold cave an' all that; but that doesn't fetch back them lost ten years. Ef I live an' keep my health, that'll be only a remnant ov the Sioux nation left ter bother Uncle Sam when I git through."

Trapper Tom made no reply, for his attention was directed to a movement among the boughs of a tree almost beyond rifle-shot.

"What is it, boy?" asked Old Tomahawk seeing the boy's attention fixed on the tree.

"An Indian, I think," was the answer.

Without difficulty the Indian-fighter was shown the tree noticed by the Wood Imp, and for several minutes he watched it intently with a cocked rifle in his hand.

"Thet red-skin is tryin' to git above us fer a shot," he said. "Ef we let him git inter position one ov us will drop quicker than we kin say Jack Robinson. I'll just put a period to that buck's career. Now watch 'im drop."

Old Tomahawk's rifle was now at his shoulder, and covering an object in the distant tree he touched the trigger.

As the clear report of the weapon rung through the aisles of the forest something was seen to drop downward through the boughs and all at once an Indian landed in a heap on the ground.

"No more strategy for that red!" ejaculated Old Tomahawk, glancing at Trapper Tom with a smile.

The dead Indian was not permitted to lie more than a minute where he had fallen, for several red-skins darted from behind trees that concealed their bodies, and dragged the corpse out of sight.

Old Tomahawk burst into a fit of laughter at the immoderate haste of the red-skins who whisked their unfortunate companion away, and then kept their own bodies from the Indian-fighter's unerring aim.

As the morning advanced the forest became lighter, and at sunrise one could see a great distance among the trees.

"The Indians have not returned from chasing Owen," observed Trapper Tom.

At that moment a distant yell was heard, then another and another until the whites had counted seven.

"They've caught him, by hokey!" exclaimed Old Tomahawk.

"Who? Owen?"

"Who else? Those yells mean that the reds ar' returnin' with a prisoner. I counted on the boy gettin' away, fer I've seen him run afore. Something must hev happened to him. We'll see directly."

A commotion among the Indians in the forest in front of the fort was now observable, and Old Tomahawk and the Wood Imp turned their faces toward that part of the wood from whence the seven yells had come.

Three hours had elapsed since Owen's departure, chased by fifty yelling red Indians, and now he was coming back, no doubt to be tortured to death in the presence of his friends!

Presently figures were seen moving toward the fort, and then the savages stationed behind the trees set up yells of delight.

"They've run my young deer down, sure enough!" grated Old Tomahawk as he eyed the advancing Indians in ill humor. "By the eternal! if they harm a hair ov his head in my presence, somebody will suffer for it."

In less than five minutes the occupants of the fort observed Owen the half-breed walking erect in the midst of the triumphant Indians, who watched him closely.

"We must save him!" cried Trapper Tom.

"Owen shall not be tortured to death by those red demons."

"Ov course he sha'n't; but just hold yer peace," said Old Tomahawk, who had not taken his eyes from the advancing band for a moment. "Owen an' me hev sworn to be friends till death, an' ter stand by one another through thick an' thin. An' don't we intend to do that? Ah! Trapper Tom, Owen shall not die!"

The captors of the yellow boy were soon joined by the Indians who had remained behind, and the whole formed a large crowd just beyond rifle-shot.

Old Tomahawk and Trapper Tom strained their eyes as they looked on, wondering what would be the red-skins' next move.

If they could have advanced nearer, they would have observed that the face and clothes of Owen the half-breed were sadly torn by briers, as if he had attempted to force his way through a patch of them.

He presented a sorry picture as he stood surrounded by the red-skins who wanted his blood; but the fire in his eyes was undimmed, and his stature seemed to have increased since his capture.

There was at first a disposition on the part of the Sioux who had not joined in the chase to rush upon Owen and tear him to pieces; and they would have done so if the captors had not pressed them back.

"We take the yellow boy closer to the place where his pale-faced friends are hid, and there we'll burn him at the stake," said Owen's captors. "He has shed the blood of the Sioux, and fire shall dry up the current in his veins."

This was received with loud shouts that made Old Tomahawk grate his teeth again, and a moment later the whole crowd surged toward the fort.

"I see nothing of Mountain Pete," said Trapper Tom.

"I see him plainly," was Old Tomahawk's response. "He's fixed up like a full-blooded Sioux, but he can't fool me. He is the big Injun on the right. I'll bet my life that Owen has picked him out afore this."

The Indians continued to approach the fort until they had reached a spot about two hundred yards distant, where they halted, and without ceremony proceeded to bind Owen to a young tree, the body of which was about twelve inches in diameter.

"What did I tell you?" said the old Indian-slayer. Trapper Tom did not appear to hear him.

"Don't you see?" the boy suddenly exclaimed. "They are going to burn Owen right before our eyes! That tree is to be his stake, and we are to crouch here with loaded rifles and submit to the whole affair!"

"Mebbe so," was the tantalizing answer. "What kin we do for the yellow boy?"

"With our sixteen-shooters we can spring over the logs and pour death into the Indian ranks."

"An' see a tomahawk bury itself in Owen's head for our trouble, too."

Trapper Tom did not reply; he silently acknowledged the logic of Tomahawk's last remarks, and was forced to turn his attention to a sight that maddened him.

When the tying operation had been completed, a stalwart Indian—a veritable red giant—stepped forward and waved his hand toward the fort.

"The Sioux have caught the yellow friend of the pale-faces," he said, in a loud voice, whose tones easily reached Trapper Tom and his companion. "They have tied him to a tree in the forest, an' they will soon pile sticks of wood about his legs. The yellow boy has shot the Sioux down like dogs; he has trailed them even to their villages an' struck them there. He is the friend of the white man who hates and hunts the Sioux for what they did to him many, many moons ago. When the Sioux have burnt the yellow boy with fire, they will take the pale-faces from their fort an' burn them, too. Let them look on an' see how their friend dies. He will whine like a dog when the red tongues lick his skin."

The big brave ceased and turned away.

"Thet war Mountain Pete," said Old Tomahawk. "He makes a good Injun when he's fixed up. Did yer notice how Owen watched 'im while he talked?"

"He never took his eyes from him for a moment."

"Nobody kin tell how he hates Mountain Pete," the Indian-fighter continued. "He knows that he has found the man he has hunted for so long. Give Owen a chance an' Mountain Pete's career will end before our eyes. Thet boy's life desire is to avenge the death of his mother—the Crow princess."

To Mountain Pete's address Old Tomahawk made no reply.

"We'll treat the dog with silence," he said. "I will waste no words with such a brute."

The Sioux now began to collect sticks which they heaped about the nether limbs of the doomed boy who stood erect against the body of the tree, with a pair of blazing eyes fixed on Mountain Pete.

The renegade stood a few feet away with arms folded on his brawny chest, and with an expression of brutish triumph on his swarthy countenance.

"Yellow boy hunt me no more," he suddenly said. "When I have scattered your ashes to the winds, I will turn upon your friends in the fort."

"They will put a speedy end to the career of the renegade dog!" exclaimed Owen. "I have hunted you a long time, but you have always eluded me. Now I am your prisoner. Mountain Pete, do you know why I have trailed you to the very lodges of the red-men?"

"I must have stepped on your toes somewhar," was the response.

"You have done more than that. Mountain Pete, don't you know me?"

The question was asked in a tone that drove Mountain Pete toward the captive.

"Do you remember the Crow wife you once whipped to death?" continued Owen.

An exclamation fell from Mountain Pete's lips.

"Ah! you have not forgotten her! Well, I am her son."

"An' my son, too!"

A bound took the desperado to Owen's side.

"Stand back, murderer. Don't touch me!" cried the yellow boy.

He spoke too late, for with one foot Mountain Pete sent the sticks flying in every direction, and the knife that glittered in his hand liberated the captive in the twinkling of an eye!

"Mountain Pete's boy!" he said to the astonished Indians as he jerked Owen from the tree.

"No! my mother's son, and her sworn avenger!" was the thundering response.

As the last words still trembled the half breed's lips he darted at Mountain Pete, and tore his rifle from his grasp.

"I have found you at last!" he cried. "Though you are my father, I avenge the death of my mother, the beautiful princess of the Crows."

With face aflame with rage Mountain Pete started toward the boy.

"Here ends my trail and yours!" said Owen.

The next moment the renegade's rifle spoke his doom, and the stalwart figure of Mountain Pete staggered from the muzzle!

The forest tragedy seemed to paralyze the red spectators.

They did not recover until they saw Owen bounding toward the fort eagerly awaited by its breathless occupants.

They suddenly darted after him with wild cries, but Trapper Tom and Old Tomahawk sprung up and presented their rifles.

The menace of those death-dealing weapons was enough for the Sioux; they stopped, and taking to the trees, made their way back to the captiveless stake.

As for Owen, he kept on until he bounded over the log, and alighted between his two friends.

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE LAST TRAIL.

WHILE Owen was relating his adventures to Trapper Tom and Tomahawk, the Indians gathered around the body of Mountain Pete whose skull had been shattered by a bullet fired at close range.

The renegade had met his fate at last at the hands of his own son, for his brutal treatment of the Crow princess, once his wife.

After his narrative Owen turned toward the scene visible in the forest and regarded it thoughtfully for some time.

He seemed to live over much of his checkered past during his silence, and the two lookers-on did not disturb him.

"We will go now, Tomahawk," he said calmly. "Owen's trail has ended, and he can go back to his people."

"To the Crows?"

"Why not? Can he not return to his mother's grave an' say that the man who whipped her can strike no more?"

"Thet's just what you kin do," was the Indian-fighter's reply. "I'd like ter go with you, boy, ef I could spare the time. But first I've got ter help Trapper Tom git his pelts to the tradin' post, an' next I'm goin' ter settle with a few more red-skins fer that long crazy spell ov mine."

"Owen help his white brother too. Back to the cave, then."

"But not with all those Indians in our front," said Trapper Tom.

"Ov course not. At any rate we won't attempt ter leave this fort to-day."

The Sioux did not charge the fort again, but sent in an Indian flag of truce and asked permission to carry off their dead.

They were carefully watched by the three friends while they performed this operation, and when the last one had been borne away the last Sioux quietly disappeared.

Still the occupants of the fort did not evacuate it until the shades of night had fallen again; then they slipped away in Indian file and glided noiselessly through the darkened forest.

In the Indian country one must be always on the alert; not a single sense must slumber for a moment.

The slightest noise must reach the white man's ear, and his eye must be able to take in whole scenes at a glance.

The three friends were still in the greatest danger.

It is true that the Sioux had to all appearances withdrawn; but they were probably in the vicinity planning new deviltry, and eager to get the scalps which thus far had eluded them.

The gold cave where Trapper Tom had left the valuable pelts was now the objective point.

It was miles from the fort, but the trio expected to reach it before morning.

Once in its recesses, they believed that they could bid defiance to the red-skins, for it was capable of being defended by a small force against overwhelming numbers.

That night-journey through the forest was accomplished without a loud voice, and we may add without incident of any kind.

Morning was near at hand when the trio reached the gold cave.

Eager to ascertain whether his pelts were safe, Trapper Tom lowered himself into the cavern, and torch in hand darted toward the niche.

All at once, however, a huge object rose in his path, and the next instant the boy recoiled from the ferocious head of a grizzly.

It was a meeting entirely unexpected, and as the bear exhibited signs of rage, the Wood Imp dropped his light and raised his rifle.

"Don't shoot him! I'm sp'ilin' for a b'ar fight!" cried the voice of Tomahawk, as the boy's rifle struck his shoulder.

He spoke too late, for Tom's rifle cracked before

he reached his side, and with a growl that filled the cavern, Old Ephraim retreated into the niche.

"I'll fight him yet!" exclaimed Old Tomahawk, picking up the torch and dashing fiercely at the grizzly.

Both Trapper Tom and Owen attempted to restrain the veteran, but without avail, for they saw him fling the torch at the bear's head, and then charge him with naked knife.

"Let them fight it out," said Owen, holding Tom back. "I never knew Old Tomahawk to kill a grizzly with a rifle. He always finishes the combat with the knife."

The two boys stood aloof from the struggle, but not for long.

They saw two figures writhing in the flickering light of the torch, and now and then caught sight of a gleaming blade.

At last the combatants separated, and Old Tomahawk, with his clothes torn to shreds, came from the niche.

"Thet's ther toughest incident I ever tackled," he said, and then dropped with a groan at the boy's feet.

"Heavens! he is dead!" exclaimed Trapper Tom. "The grizzly has finished Old Tomahawk!"

An examination revealed the fact that the grizzly-fighter had fainted, also that he was horribly mutilated, and apparently near death's door.

Trapper Tom took the torch and examined the grizzly.

The body was literally covered with knife-wounds, several of which were in the heart, and the bear was dead.

While Owen was working with Old Tomahawk, Trapper Tom proceeded to inspect the place where he had left his pelts.

To his great joy he found them all safe with the exception of the one bundle which, as the reader will recollect, was carried off by Young Eagle, the Sioux.

"They'll bring me a good round sum, anyhow," he said, as he surveyed the heap. "Heaven knows I've had adventures enough defending them. Old Tomahawk is welcome to his gold mine if he recovers. I've got enough of this part of the Northwest, and henceforward I'll give it a wide berth."

It was not until three weeks after these last events, to come to the conclusion of our story, that Trapper Tom started for the nearest trading-post with his furs.

For some days Old Tomahawk hovered between life and death, but his iron constitution brought him through, and at last the trio left the gold cave to brave the perils of a forest tramp to the post.

As Old Tomahawk knew the trails of the great Northwest as a pilot knows the river, he led the expedition, which in due time passed the gates of the post, and Trapper Tom had the pleasure of throwing his furs at the feet of the agent.

The sum that he received for them with the nuggets brought from Old Tomahawk's gold mine, he found himself well fixed for the remainder of his youth, and he announced his intention of quitting the wild sports of forest and stream and of turning his face toward the East.

A few days after his return to the trading-post, he was called upon to say good-by to his two faithful friends, Old Tomahawk and Owen.

"I'm goin' back to work that mine ov mine an' ter settle with a few reds ag'in' whom I've got a standin' grudge," said the old Indian-hater as he held Trapper Tom's hand in his rough palm. "Mebbe they'll git the best ov Old Tomahawk this time, boy; but all creation couldn't keep me out ov that kentry. I'm ready fer anything ag'in—from a grizzly fight to a tussle with a red."

"Owen say good-by, too," said a voice as Old Tomahawk finished. "The Crow boy go back to his mother now. He has seen the flag of the pale-faces for the last time. His home will be where the

lodges of the Crows stand, and he will hunt the buffalo and deer in the land of his mother's people. White trapper has seen Owen strike down the hand that struck the Princess of the Crows. Owen goes back to the trails of his boyhood."

There was moisture in the young half-breed's eyes when he turned away, and Trapper Tom clung to his swarthy hand as long as he was able.

"We shall not part thus!" he exclaimed. "I will go back with you!"

He was pushed back by the hand of Old Tomahawk, and a moment later the gate of the trading-post opened, and shut and he saw his friends no more.

Only last summer a gaunt sun-browned man, carrying a long rifle across his arm, entered a business house in Omaha, and stretched a bronzed hand across the counter to the young proprietor.

"Don't you know yer old pard, Trapper Tom?" exclaimed the stranger.

There was an exclamation of joy.

"Old Tomahawk!"

"That's my handle. I've lost ther gold mine; but I got even with the Sioux! I'm hyar ter stay."

"Where's Owen?" inquired Mr. Tom Merrill, once the Wood Imp of the Northwest.

"Oh, he's kickin' somewhar in Crowdum. They've made him head chief ov the hull tribe, an' a finer lookin' Injun king never robbed an eagle's nest."

THE END.

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